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"THERE SHE IS!" CRIED ROY, EXCITEDLY
(See page 49)

[L]OSING A YACHT

OR

The Theft of the "Gem"

BY

JAMES OTIS

AUTHOR OF

"The Braganza Diamond," "Toby Tyler," Etc.

PHILADELPHIA
THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY
1894

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CHASING A YACHT

CHAPTER I

THE "GEM"

"If we had a craft like that, Ned, it wouldn't take us long to earn the money we need."

"So far as I can judge she isn't much better than a wreck."

"That's because she has lain here so long without being cared for. Her seams have opened badly; but it wouldn't be such a hard job to calk them, or to get the dust off that engine, and two coats of paint would make a wonderful difference in her appearance."

"She's a handsome model, there's no mistake, and it is just about large enough to run on this end of the lake carrying passengers. When the summer visitors come to Whitehall, she would be in good demand for excursion parties. If

she were in proper condition I wouldn't be afraid to run up as far as Port Kent in her."

The Barclay boys were looking in through the window of Mr. Sampson's boat-house, in which was an oil-burning steam launch, with the rear cabin enclosed, the forward cabin open, and, perched on the hurricane deck, within a dozen feet of the bow, a tiny wheel-house, where two people might have succeeded in remaining, providing they were willing to endure considerable squeezing.

Mr. Sampson's summer residence was within three miles of Whitehall, in the State of New York, and the boat-house stood on that portion of the property which bordered the lake.

Roy and Ned Barclay remembered well when the "Gem" was launched, and a jaunty, beautiful little craft she was then, in all the bravery of new paint, clean awnings, and silken flags.

Since the day they first saw her, however, she had fallen into a state of decay through willful neglect, and now looked as worn and

battered as if she had seen extremely hard service, instead of having been used probably not more than twenty times.

Before her first season was more than half ended, Mr. Sampson and his family were suddenly called back to their home in New York city, and the care-taker of the place had appeared to consider it no portion of his duty to pay any attention to the little steamer, as could be readily told by her general appearance on this particular spring morning when Roy and Ned, having nothing of especial importance to occupy their time and attention, were gazing at the weather-worn craft with envious eyes, speculating as to the amount of money which might be earned with her in case she belonged to them.

So engrossed were the boys that neither heard the approaching footsteps as the owner of the neglected craft, whom they supposed to be many miles away, came around the corner of the boat-house, and stood listening to their conversation.

"So you think the 'Gem' would be entirely

different if you owned her?" Mr. Sampson asked, when Roy had fully explained what he would do if the craft were his.

The boys looked up in surprise, and the question was repeated before either had recovered sufficient presence of mind to make any answer.

Then Roy said, very decidedly:

"Yes, sir, if she had belonged to us she would not be looking as old, and nearly worn out as she does now; it isn't hard usage, but neglect, which makes her so shabby and apparently unseaworthy."

"I fancy you're right, my boy. The little craft doesn't appear to be of any great value now."

"But she could soon be made as good as new, sir," Ned replied.

"Perhaps so; but it would be very much like buying her over again, I fancy, so far as the expense is concerned."

"Her engine seems to be all right, and of course there can be nothing serious the trouble with the hull. If one man should work at her

a couple of weeks it would make a big difference," Roy added.

"Suppose she were yours, what would you do with her?" and Mr. Sampson looked at the boys curiously.

"Get her into shape to let, and run regular trips between Whitehall and Ticonderoga, or charter her by the day, after summer visitors come to the lake," was the prompt reply.

"Do you know anything about an engine of this kind?"

"No, sir; I never took the trouble to learn, because there is precious little chance I shall ever own a boat like her. If I did have one, though, it wouldn't take a great while to find out how to run her."

"Well, boys, I am going to make a proposition. You have done a good deal of work for me during the past few years, and I have always found you faithful and honest. This steamer cost me sixteen hundred dollars. If you will take her, make your own repairs, learn how to work the engine, and carry out the plan you

proposed, I will give you a bill of sale of the craft, provided you pay me fifty per cent. of her net earnings at the end of one year."

"Do you mean that, sir?" Roy asked, so much surprised by the generous offer that he could hardly credit the gentleman's words.

"Indeed I do," was the laughing reply. "From this moment until I am satisfied you don't know how to set about making the necessary repairs, she is the same as your property, and you are at liberty to use this boat-house as a workshop, with the understanding that it is cleaned thoroughly, and kept in proper condition while you are the occupants."

The boys were so astonished and delighted by this wonderfully generous proposition that before they could recover from the bewilderment sufficiently to thank the gentleman he had disappeared.

"Well," Roy said with a long-drawn sigh, "that goes ahead of any fairy story I ever heard! The idea of the 'Gem's' being just the same as ours—"

"But we are to put her in good condition, and it will cost considerable money."

"Not if we do the work ourselves, and of course that is what must be done."

"Then again one of us will be obliged to learn how to run the engine. To do that, a trip to Albany, where she was built, becomes necessary."

"The money we have saved will come very near paying all those bills," Roy said, decidedly. "I'll answer for that part of it. Now let's see what must be done first, for I want to have the little craft afloat as soon as possible."

The boys spent the next hour trying to decide how they should begin the task in the most economical manner, and before their plans were fully perfected, Bill Dean and Sam Huntley, two acquaintances, but not friends, entered the building.

"You fellers better mind your eyes!" Bill cried, warningly. "Mr. Sampson come up from New York last night, an' he'll raise a row if he sees you foolin' 'round his boat."

"We've seen him," Roy replied, curtly, for he never considered Bill a desirable acquaintance; but yet he could not resist the temptation to tell of the good fortune which had come to them. "We've got charge of the 'Gem' now, and are going to run her this year."

"Oh! yes, you are!" Sam cried, sarcastically.

"Well, it's a fact," Ned said, earnestly, and at once related the details of the proposition made by Mr. Sampson.

"Well say, you fellers are in luck!" Bill cried, enviously, when the story was finished. "I never heard anything like it before! It'll take a good deal of money to put her in shape, though."

"I reckon we can raise it without much trouble," and Roy began closing the shutters of the boat-house, that the little craft should not be exposed to the elements now she was under his control.

"But if you're goin' to run her for passengers, it'll take more than two fellers to do the work."

"I guess we can get as much help as will be needed."

"See here, Roy," and Bill assumed a confidential tone and manner. "S'posen you let Sam an' me come into this trade? That'll only divide the profits into quarters, an' there won't be anybody to hire; besides, four can get her in shape twice as quick as two."

"But we don't want any partners," Roy replied, firmly. "Then again, I aint sure Mr. Sampson would like it. He said we were to have her if we did all the work ourselves, and it wouldn't be a fair thing to call in a lot of others."

"Oh! I can fix that all right with him; he knows me. Now you just look at it! With all hands on the job she would be launched in a week, an' when you get to runnin' her reg'lar, you'll need somebody to spell you once in a while, so if four own her, one of the crowd could be off every day. That would make it easier all 'round an' then you two wouldn't have to put out so much money, 'cause me an' Sam would come up with our share."

"No, I don't believe we'll do anything of the kind," Roy said, and then, speaking decidedly, but doing their best to clothe the refusal in friendly words, both he and Ned gave the would-be partners to understand that their proposition could not be entertained for an instant.

Bill and Sam were not disposed to consider the refusal as final. They brought forward every possible argument in favor of making a joint stock company of the concern; urged their peculiar fitness for the passenger-business; laid great stress upon the desirability of having no one employed on board except those who were pecuniarily interested, and, in fact, exhausted every proposition which might prove tempting, in trying to persuade the new owners of the "Gem" into sharing with them the good fortune which had come so suddenly and unexpectedly.

Understanding he was likely to fail by these methods, Bill resorted to threats.

"Try to keep us out of this snap, an' see how

long you can run that boat!" he cried, angrily. "Why Sam an' me would sit up every night for a week but what we'd stop you!"

"You don't dare to do anything of the kind; she is ours, and you'd find yourself arrested mighty quick if you tried crooked business," Roy retorted.

"Oh! we would, eh? Well, you beat us out of our share of this boat, for we've just as much right to her as you have, an' see what we'll do!"

"What do you mean by 'beating you out of your share?' I can't see that you ever had any interest in her."

"Perhaps I hadn't so long as Mr. Sampson wanted to keep her; but when it comes to givin' her away, I claim my rights."

"I'd like to know what your rights amount to, or how you ever got any, so far as this yacht is concerned?" Ned cried, impatiently. "She hasn't been given away, as you seem to think; but Mr. Sampson made a regular trade with us."

"Well, s'posen he did, how's that goin' to prevent our comin' into the snap?"

"We don't want partners, and won't have any, so that's how you'll be prevented."

"Perhaps you think you own everything 'round here?"

"I am not quite as foolish as that; but this yacht is in our charge, and the boat-house has been loaned to us, therefore it looks as if we have rights here which you haven't."

"Don't be so certain about that, Ned Barclay!" Bill cried, with a menacing gesture, and Sam stepped quickly to his friend's side to show he was ready to follow the latter's example. "If you let us in as partners, things will run along smooth; but if you count on holdin' sich a snap alone, there's bound to be trouble."

"It won't be a bad plan to keep such threats to yourself," Roy cried, as he moved nearer his brother. "If you think we are likely to be frightened by what you may say, there'll soon be a chance of learning you've made a mistake."

As is usual in such cases, one angry word led to

another, and before the "Gem's" new owners had any idea hostilities had begun, Bill struck Roy quite a blow, and then, followed by Sam, he walked quickly away, for both understood that it might not be safe to remain in the vicinity, lest Mr. Sampson should appear upon the scene.

Not until they were a long distance from the boat-house did either speak, and then Bill, halting suddenly, wheeled to face his friend.

"They tell about fools for luck, an' I believe it's the truth!" he exclaimed, angrily. "The idea of them Barclay boys fallin' into sich a snap as to get the 'Gem' for jest the same as nothin'!"

"Well, it's no use kickin'," Sam replied, philosophically. "They've got her, an' we're out in the cold, so that's the end of it."

"It isn't by a good deal! Do you think I'm going to let them fellers have as much luck as they're gettin', without doing anything to stop it?"

"I don't know how you can help yourself."

"See here, Sam, are you willin' to go in with me in this thing?"

"What are you countin' on doin'?"

"Makin' them fellers let us come in as partners."

"But they won't."

"I aint so sure about that. S'pose we should get hold of the boat an' run her off? They'd be mighty glad to make any kind of a trade for the sake of gettin' her back. Old Sampson won't stay 'round here a great while longer, an' after he's gone we've got jest as much right to the yacht as anybody else."

"Are you countin' on stealin' her?"

"It won't be stealin' to take her away from them fellers."

"But how will you do it? She's got to be fixed up before anybody can run her."

"We'll let them chumps do the work, an' the minute they're through, we'll sneak in. There's nothin' around Whitehall, outside of a tug-boat, that could catch us after we once got away, an' it wouldn't be anything more'n a high old time

to live aboard the 'Gem' two or three weeks. But we sha'n't have a chance to do that, for jest as soon as they see we've got the upper hand, both of 'em will be mighty glad to 'gree to our terms. Now will you come into the job with me?"

"I'm willin' to do whatever you say."

"All right; we'll lay low till they get her into runnin' order, an' then it'll be our turn. Don't say a word about it to anybody. We'll sneak over here nights to see how they're gettin' along, an' in less'n twenty-four hours from the time she's launched we'll be on board of her scootin' up the lake. Then it'll be *our* turn to say what shall be done."

CHAPTER II

MISSING

No reasonable person could have found fault with Roy and Ned on the score of idleness, from the day Mr. Sampson put them in possession of the "Gem," until she was finally afloat.

When Bill and Sam left the boat-house hurriedly, as if fearing pursuit, Ned insisted he and his brother should follow the boy who had made the unprovoked assault, in order to punish him as he deserved; but Roy refused to listen to any proposition of the kind.

"We can't afford to waste the time," he said, decidedly. "I'm not counting on letting the matter drop, but sha'n't make an effort to square up with Bill until after the steamer is afloat. Just now the proper thing for us is to get the yacht into sailing condition, otherwise Mr. Sampson may think he was foolish in making us such a generous proposition."

Then Roy explained how the work should be done, and before night-fall both were laboring earnestly at the task before them, with all idea of possible mischief on the part of Bill and Sam very far from their thoughts.

The boys' united capital amounted to a trifle more than twenty dollars. In order to prepare the "Gem" for passenger service, it was absolutely necessary the seams should be calked, the wood-work scraped, and at least two coats of paint be put on both inside and out.

To this was to be added Roy's expenses to Albany and return, when he visited the manufacturers of the engine in order to learn how to run it, and in case it should be necessary to remain two or three days, as seemed quite probable, at least two-thirds of the capital would be required for that purpose.

In order that they might be able to take advantage of Mr. Sampson's generous offer in a proper manner, Mr. Barclay agreed to loan the boys, on their joint note, such an amount of money as would be required for all purposes,

with the understanding that it should be repaid from the first earnings of the yacht.

The week which followed their being put in possession of the "Gem" was a busy one for the young boatmen, and they took advantage of every hour of daylight.

At the expiration of that time everything had been done to the little craft, save putting the machinery in order, and the day had arrived when Roy should leave town.

Nothing had been seen of either Bill or Sam since the unprovoked assault, and neither Roy nor Ned had the slightest suspicion their would-be partners meditated mischief against the little steamer.

While Roy was absent Ned busied himself by putting the interior of the boat-house into the proper condition, according to the stipulation made by Mr. Sampson, and when his brother returned, after an absence of three days, the former owner of the "Gem" could not but have been pleased with the general appearance of things on or around that portion of his property.

"Yes, I shall be able to handle her without trouble," Roy said, in reply to his brother's question, when the two were at the boat-house once more. "The people who sold this steamer to Mr. Sampson were perfectly willing to give me such information as I needed, and I stayed at their machine shop nearly all the time I was in Albany. It isn't a difficult job to run one of these boats, after you understand it, and while we are getting the machinery in order I'll explain what I have learned, so that either of us can attend to it."

It was four days before Roy had the engine in what he considered a proper condition, and when, at the expiration of that time, the young boatmen ceased work for the night, it was with the understanding that the "Gem" should be launched the following morning.

That Bill Dean had not abandoned his idea of attempting to "pay Ned and Roy off" because of their refusal to take him as a partner, was shown on this evening when he met Sam Huntley at the post-office.

"We'll, they've got the craft into shape at last," he whispered, after having beckoned Sam into one corner where the words would not be overheard, "an' I tell you she looks fine! Painted black outside, with a red ribbon, an' white inside. Them fellers must have spent a pile of money!"

"When are they goin' to launch her?" Sam asked, not particularly interested in the details, because the main portion of the scheme absorbed all his interest.

"To-morrow some time."

"Don't you s'pose they'll sleep aboard of her after she's in the water?"

"It aint likely. I reckon she'll be anchored a little way off shore, same's when Mr. Sampson used to run her."

"You still hold to it we can get away with her, an' not find ourselves in a scrape?"

"Of course I do. You must meet me near the boat-house jest as soon as it's dark'to-morrow, an' bring all the grub you can get hold of, 'cause it aint likely we'll be home again for a long while."

"Do your folks know you're countin' on stayin' away?"

"I'm goin' to say that you an' I want to go up the lake fishin' for two or three days, an' you must tell the same yarn at your house."

"All right, I'll be there, but I aint so sure about the grub, Bill."

"Your mother will give you plenty if she thinks you're goin' fishin'."

"I don't know 'bout that; I'll try it, though."

"If you can't get a good lot you must raise money somehow to buy some. I'll have my share there."

"I'll agree to bring as much as you do," Sam replied, confidently.

"Then I'll meet you to-morrow night. I reckon it won't be best for us to go 'round much together until then, 'cause if Roy an' Ned should see us they might mistrust something."

The conspirators separated, and on the following morning the "Gem" was allowed to slip down the well-greased skids into the water, where she danced and courtesied on the tiny

waves like a sea bird pluming its wings for a longer flight.

"There's no mistake about her being a beauty!" Roy said, admiringly, as he and Ned paused an instant before going out in the tender to moor her. "She looked handsome enough in the house, but that wasn't anything alongside of what she is afloat."

"What makes her still more of a beauty is that she belongs to us, and do you know, Roy, I can hardly credit it even now. Every morning when I waken it seems as if I am about to discover I've been dreaming all this while; that we don't own such a craft, and never will."

"It has been a pretty long dream, anyhow, and it'll last all summer, the way things look now," Roy replied laughingly. "We'll get a buoy in position, so's to have a mooring-place, and then I'll try my hand at running the engine. Of course she's bound to leak a little at first, and we must stay by her all day, so we may as well have a sail."

"Then let's dress her up in fine shape. I'll

get the cushions, flags, and awnings. It won't take a great while to put them where they belong."

Ned was running back to the boat-house before his brother could have made any protest had he been so disposed, and when the boys finally went on board the yacht, which was moored only by a light hawser from the shore, they had all her fittings with them.

She did take in some water, to be sure, but not as much as might have been expected considering the long time she had been hauled up, and Ned worked a small hand-pump while Roy dressed the yacht in the most becoming fashion.

By the time this work had been done, the seams were so nearly closed that she did not leak badly, and the amateur engineer put to a test the knowledge he had gained in Albany.

He had prepared himself for his duties in as thorough a manner as a boy can be expected to do in three days' time, and, thanks to the simplicity of the machinery, had no difficulty

either in raising steam, or in starting and stopping her at will.

"Now take the helm, and I'll cast off the hawser. We'll make one trip up the lake, if no more!" Roy cried, enthusiastically, when the gauge showed that sufficient steam had been generated.

What an enjoyable sail that was!

With a "full head on" the "Gem" could run about eight miles an hour, and in a reasonable length of time she had steamed halfway to Chubb's and back, the boys returning to the mooring-place fully two hours before sunset, thoroughly well satisfied with the trial trip. They were convinced beyond a question that they would be able to sail her as proposed.

The little steamer was made fast for the night, and her flags hauled down and folded carefully in the locker. The cushions were placed in the after-cabin where there would be no possibility of their getting wet during the night, and on this evening the young boatmen decided upon a

time-table which should be in force during the coming season.

"We'll have a lot of these printed," Roy said after he had made a fair copy of the proposed announcement, "so we can distribute them around town."

"How does the money hold out?" Ned asked.

"We borrowed twelve dollars of father, and have four left, so we sha'n't be so very badly in debt. Twenty-four passengers will pay that off."

"When shall you begin to make regular trips?" Mr. Barclay asked.

"Next Monday morning. Of course we sha'n't do very much at first, but running around the lake will be a good advertisement for us, and the steamer will be well known by the time the summer visitors get here."

When the boys retired that night it was to dream of a fortune made in the steamboat business, and before Ned awakened he was the half-owner of a fleet of boats, each quite as jaunty as the "Gem," all of which were making hourly trips, loaded to the water-line with passengers.

The young yacht-owners were awake bright and early next morning, for the important business of getting the printing done was to be attended to without delay, and, in addition, both were eager to be on board the little craft once more.

The dew was yet sparkling on the grass, and the birds had not finished their morning hymns when Roy and Ned arrived at the boat-house, where they stood as if suddenly stricken motionless and dumb, looking out over the lake.

The yacht was nowhere to be seen!

The buoy to which she had been moored was in its proper position, but the steamer had disappeared.

"Do you suppose she has sunk?" Ned asked, in a whisper, for his surprise and sorrow were so great that he could not control his voice sufficiently to speak in a natural tone.

"Of course she hasn't. That's a foolish question to ask. Somebody has stolen her!"

Just at that instant Ben Cushing drove down the road from the town, and on seeing Roy and

Ned, pulled his horse up suddenly as he asked, in surprise:

"How did you fellows get here so quick?"

"So quick?" Roy repeated. "We haven't been anywhere yet. Just came over from the house, and find that the yacht has disappeared."

"I saw her half an hour ago steaming up to town. I thought you fellows were on board of her."

"I only wish we were!" Ned cried, passionately, and then added to Roy, "this is some of Bill Dean's work! I was afraid he wouldn't stop with giving you that one thump, and there's precious little chance we shall ever see the 'Gem' afloat again, for he'll manage to wreck her before night."

"I would almost be willing to know she had sunk, rather than have him knock her about after all our work in fitting her out!"

CHAPTER III

THE THEFT

ALTHOUGH Bill and Sam had made up their minds to steal the "Gem" as soon as she should be launched, their plans were very far from being perfected when the time arrived for the crime to be committed.

Neither of them had believed the Barclay boys would finish their task so quickly; both had intended to study up on oil-burning engines in general, and the one belonging to the "Gem" in particular, but had failed to do so for various reasons.

The first was that quite a sum of money would be necessary in order to pay the expenses of a trip to Albany, which was probably the nearest point at which they could gain any information on the subject, and their financial affairs were in such a condition that it would have been almost impossible to raise even so small a sum as a dollar.

Then again, neither of the boys was inclined to be industrious, and considerable labor would be involved in the very essential study, therefore the matter had been neglected until it was too late.

When the day on which the little yacht was launched had come to a close, and the mantle of night had fallen, the conspirators met according to agreement.

Perhaps for the first time they realized how unprepared they were for the proposed undertaking.

"Is she all right?" Sam asked as he joined Bill, who was stationed a short distance in the rear of the boat-house.

"Yes. They have moored her a little piece from the shore, an' left the tender in the buildin', like the chumps they are, so anybody can get out to her mighty easy."

"Then you still think we'd better take her to-night?"

"Of course I do; it wouldn't pay to wait another day."

"But how are you goin' to run her? We oughter posted ourselves on that kind of business. I allowed to, but didn't really have the time, for it seems as if them fellers hurried the work along faster than men would have done."

"They have been goin' it kinder lively, for a fact, an' I was countin' all along on findin' out about oil-engines; but somehow didn't get at it. We'll sneak her off now, though. It'll be a tough job at first, but there's a feller campin' out a couple of miles up the lake, who says he knows all about this kind of machinery. We'll tow her there, an' I reckon it won't be hard to make a trade with him."

"He might suspect she didn't belong to us."

"Well, what good would that do him? He may keep on suspectin', an' if he says anything that aint jest straight, I'll show him what's what," Bill replied, with a swagger. "Now we want to begin this job mighty quick. How much provision did you bring?"

"I'll bet I've got my share," and Sam held up a large paper parcel. "Where's yours?"

Bill pointed to a package at his feet, which was considerably more bulky than the one brought by Sam, and explained how the work should be done, for he had been in hiding sufficiently long to have decided upon the best method of stealing the little craft.

"We'll sneak into the boat-house an' lug the tender down to the water. Then get two pair of oars, an' it'll be a good idea to hunt for a hawser, 'cause it aint by any means certain there's one on board the steamer. Now all this must be done on the dead quiet, for there's no knowin' who may be snoopin' 'round, an' you mustn't so much as let the oars click together when you pick them up."

"It'll be dark in there."

"Of course it will. I've got some matches, an' we can light one of them to get the general lay of things; after that we must work the best we can, for of course it wouldn't do to use a lantern, even if we had one."

"Are we to pull the yacht all the way up to that camp?"

"There's no other show of fixin' it, unless you want to back out when everything is in prime order for us to put the job through," Bill said, impatiently.

"Of course I aint countin' on doin' anything like that. I'm willin' to stick to what I 'greed, but a feller's got a right to say it's goin' to be mighty hard work."

"It'll be time enough to grumble after we get there. Come on, an' remember that we mustn't make any noise."

Bill led the way and Sam followed.

Roy and Ned had put everything to rights inside the boat-house, and the amateur pirates had but little difficulty in finding all that was needed, with no illumination save that afforded by the flame of one match.

The tender was launched and the boys pushed off to the "Gem," not making any effort to board her, but simply bending on the hawser to the short length of cable by which she was moored.

Then, each pulling a pair of oars, the thieves worked their way diagonally across the lake,

heading such a course as would enable them to strike the shore at or near the point where Bill's acquaintance was encamped.

It was as Sam had said, hard work, and even more laborious than Bill himself had fancied; but after having once left the shore they were fully committed to the deed, and it seemed a matter of necessity that they should continue on.

The night was calm, with hardly a breath of wind stirring, therefore the task was not quite as tiresome as it might have been under less favorable circumstances.

When they had finally brought the little steamer within a dozen feet of the shore at the desired spot, and there anchored her, it seemed to both the pirates as if their strength was absolutely exhausted.

"Let's go on board an' turn in a spell before we try to find that feller," Sam suggested. "I'm played out. It don't seem as if I could even so much as walk up to his camp."

"But that's what you've got to do," Bill said, quite sharply. "If we should lie down now, the

chances are we'd both go to sleep, an' then what kind of a figger would we cut in the mornin'? Them Barclay boys are bound to be out by sunrise, an', of course, will find the boat missin'. Ben Cushing is comin' down to Whitehall to bring his father, an' if he should see the 'Gem' layin' here it wouldn't be more'n ten minutes before Roy and Ned knew exactly where to look for us."

"But how much better off are you countin' we shall be, by goin' ashore now?"

"We'll have the feller on board what knows how to work the engine, an' then I don't care how soon the Barclay chumps find out where we are."

Sam was not so thick-headed but that he could readily understand how necessary it was to adopt the plan suggested by his brother pirate, and, despite his weariness, he went on shore.

Well acquainted as the boys were with the locality, there was no difficulty in finding the camping-place of this fellow who was supposed

to be an expert in the art of running an oil-burning engine, and the young gentleman was soon aroused from his slumbers.

Tom Tracey was the boy's name, and when he arrived at Whitehall, two weeks previous, announcing his intention of "camping out on the bank of the lake," those with whom he talked expressed considerable surprise that he should indulge in such a form of amusement at a time of year when there was no game to be found, and while the weather was yet so cool as to render life in a shanty quite a hardship.

He explained that it was the only season of the year when he could take a vacation from business, and that he was accustomed to living in the woods, having frequently done so even as far east as Maine; but he told so many different stories regarding his alleged occupation that several of the citizens did not hesitate to say openly he was "probably no better than he should be," while more than one of the farmers felt decidedly uneasy when he was in the vicinity of their chicken-coops.

Tom was considerably surprised at receiving a visit at such an hour, and also at learning that Bill was in possession of a yacht; but he refrained from asking very many questions.

He repeated his previous statement that he was thoroughly well acquainted with such an engine as the boys explained was on board the "Gem," and declared his willingness to go wherever they wished; but insisted on having some knowledge as to the probable duration and purpose of the cruise.

"Tell me what you count on doin'," he said, when Bill proposed to go on board at once in order that he might be ready to raise steam whenever it should be necessary.

"We'll run 'round the lake a couple of weeks, an' dodge in anywhere we please, that's all," Bill replied. "We're just out for a lark."

"Yes, I see," Tom said, in a meaning tone, half to himself. "But I reckon we've got to kinder keep out of sight, eh?"

"I don't know about that. There's nothin' around here that could catch her; but I don't

s'pose we'd better stay very near the town much of the time."

"If you count on my runnin' the engine, the safest way will be to give me the whole story, or cook up one to suit yourselves, with truth enough in it so I shall know what to expect."

Bill saw that this new friend of his had a very good idea as to the position of affairs, therefore he gave him the exact facts regarding the manner in which they had gotten possession of the yacht.

"Then I reckon I'd better pull up stakes here for good," Tom replied, as if the idea that the little steamer had been stolen was something too trifling to warrant any particular comment. "If you fellers will help me get my things down to the shore, we'll go on board right away, an' then I shall be ready to make a quick jump out of the place in case you come to grief."

Master Tracey's outfit was not very extensive, except in the way of provisions, and was soon stored on board the "Gem."

The swinging-lamp in the after-cabin was lighted, and, since it was not considered advisable to make a start until the day had begun to break, when it would be possible to see where they were running, Bill said:

"S'posen you take a look at the engine, an' see if you know how to work it?"

Tom did as he was requested, and after one hasty glance, replied, confidently:

"It's all right. I can run that thing as well as the man that made it. Is there plenty of oil on board?"

"There's enough to last till we can get more at Whitehall, for I saw the Barclay boys carryin' a five-gallon can on board yesterday mornin'."

"Then, if they didn't run her too long on the first trip we shall have plenty, and mighty soon after sunrise we'll be where it will be possible to fill the tank without trouble. Whenever you want to start, give the word, an' I'll have the screw turnin' in less than five minutes."

Bill was delighted at having found an engineer with so little difficulty, and suggested

that, as a pleasing means of passing the time, they should prepare a meal from the abundant store of provisions on board.

This proposition was accepted without debate, and when lunch, or breakfast, whichever it might be called, was finished, Master Tracey produced a pack of cards from his pocket, thus enabling the amateur pirates to enjoy themselves after their own peculiar fashion.

When the first gray light in the sky proclaimed the coming dawn, the engineer set about his task, and true to his promise, the little yacht was speeding down the lake just as Ben Cushing drove along the road.

"Now, if we don't have a spell of solid fun it'll be our own fault," Bill said, as he stood at the wheel, and Sam looked in at the door to ascertain if the helmsman understood his duty. "We've got this craft without having to do any work for her, an' there's no need of givin' her up to them Barclay chumps till we get ready, 'cause I guarantee they haven't a show of catchin' us, no matter who helps 'em."

CHAPTER IV

A PROPOSITION

Roy and Ned were not at a loss to understand what had become of the craft on which they had labored so long and faithfully.

"It's funny we never mistrusted anything before," Roy said to his brother as they stood gazing helplessly out over the water. "We ought to have known those fellows weren't keeping still for nothing. Unless there was some plan in their minds, one or both would have been around here every day we were working."

"It's no use talking about what we should have found out a long while ago," Ned said, just a trifle petulantly. "The proper question is, how are we to get her back?"

"In the first place we must borrow a boat."

"But you are not thinking it will be possible for us to overhaul the 'Gem' in a row-boat?"

"We shall have the satisfaction of knowing where she is."

"I don't understand how that will help us, because in five minutes after we sighted her she could be somewhere else."

"But we've got to do something, Ned; it won't pay to stand here grumbling."

"That's very true; but we sha'n't be effecting anything by simply trying to get a glimpse of the little craft."

"Well then, what is your idea?" and now it was Roy's turn to speak sharply.

"I haven't any."

"We might go to the authorities at Whitehall?"

"And by the time they got ready to act, the yacht would be beyond reach."

"You don't seem able to do anything but find fault with what I propose. There's one thing certain: if we give information that she has been stolen, it'll shut them off from putting into Whitehall for fuel, and if they can't get oil it won't take us long to gain possession of her again."

"Now it seems as if you had hit on a plan which might be worked successfully! I never realized the necessity of their having plenty of fuel on board. Let's borrow Fernald's boat, and start at once."

Five minutes later the two were pulling at full speed down the lake.

The stop at the town was only sufficiently long to give information of the robbery, and then the anxious boys paid a visit to the opposite shore to warn the farmers of what had been done.

Those to whom they told their story promised to aid in every possible way in capturing the thieves and the yacht; but the general belief of all was that the amateur pirates would make strenuous efforts to leave that section of the country immediately.

"I suppose Sam and Bill will try to get into the Hudson River—it isn't likely they'll attempt to run the whole length of Lake Champlain—but how is it to be done?" Ned said when they were in the boat once more, pulling

toward the town. "Neither of them know how to work the engine."

"Perhaps they posted themselves as I did."

"I don't believe either would have taken the trouble."

"But something of the kind must have been done, otherwise how did they get her away?"

"If they had—"

"There she is!" Roy cried, excitedly, rising instinctively to his feet.

Turning his head slightly, Ned could see the little steamer in which he had taken so much pride just emerging from an indentation on the easterly shore of the lake, and evidently heading directly toward them.

"Well, Bill Dean has got nerve!" Roy cried, in surprise.

"Did you expect he was going to run away the moment we came in sight?"

"I didn't think he'd come up as if anxious to see us."

"Why shouldn't he? We wouldn't stand any show of getting on board, even if they run

alongside, for it's only a question of swinging her around when they want to part company with us."

Never had the "Gem" looked so beautiful to Roy and Ned as now, when she came steaming down with "a bone in her teeth," her flags flying, and the snowy awnings fluttering in the light breeze.

Two or three moments later the angry boys could plainly distinguish Bill in the wheel-house, and he, as if understanding he was recognized, waved his hat derisively.

The "Gem" came jauntily on until within about fifty feet of the row-boat, when a signal from the helmsman to stop the screw was heard, and the little craft ran by of her own momentum until she was so near her rightful owners that they could have tossed a biscuit on board.

"Nice mornin' for rowin'," Bill said, with a grin.

Neither Roy nor Ned replied.

This mocking salutation caused their anger to rise too high to permit of words.

"I thought that craft looked natural like when you showed up round the bend, so I run down to see if you was huntin' for anything," Bill continued, while Sam and the engineer entered the open cabin forward in order to take part in the interview.

"Look here, Bill," Roy began, trying in vain to render his voice steady, for it was trembling with suppressed passion, "what is your idea in stealing our boat?"

"She aint any more yours than mine. Old Sampson turned her out for anybody who wanted her; he told me so himself just before he went down to New York."

"You know that's a lie! He sold her to us, and has agreed to give us a bill of sale."

"Well, I've got all the bill of sale I want, an' reckon I shall hold on to it."

"Do you think we are going to remain idle while you do such a wrong as this?"

"It don't make any difference whether you are or not."

"We shall get out a warrant for your

arrest!" Ned cried, unable longer to remain silent.

"All right! I reckon the sheriff will have to catch me before he can do anything, an' if I've figgered it up right, there's a mighty poor show of findin' any craft 'round here what can overhaul this yacht. In the first place I haven't stole your boat, if she should happen to be yours."

"What do you call it?" Ned asked.

"Sam an' me took possession of her till we could make some kind of a trade with you. Now I hold to it that we oughter been allowed to come in as partners in the first place. Then we'd done our share of the work, an' put in half the money that was needed. You wouldn't listen to me, when I came to you like a gentleman to talk 'bout it, so I've taken her, an' count on stayin' where I am till you 'gree to them terms. You can jump on board this very minute if you're ready to sign a paper showin' Sam an' me owns jest as much of her as you do. Now make out that's stealin', if you can!"

"I wouldn't consent to such a trade if I never saw the yacht again!"

"You'll see her plenty of times. I don't count on goin' away very far, but you'll never set your foot on her deck till we've got our rights."

"There's no use stayin' here talkin' with him," Ned whispered to his brother. "He has the upper hand of us, and will hold out as long as he can. We had better go back, and tell the authorities what he says."

"That's right," Master Dean shouted derisively. "Figger it up among yourselves; when you've settled matters jest drop me a telegraph, an' I'll meet you."

"You'd better carry Fernald's boat back, for he may need it," Sam shouted, as if something more was necessary to complete the discomfiture of the boys whom he had wronged.

"If you'll give the yacht up now, we won't say anything more about it!" Roy cried. "But if you don't, I'll have a warrant out before noon."

"I don't count on tryin' to stop you, 'cause it won't make any difference if you get a hundred warrants. I aint sich a chump as to give her up after I'm once at the top of the heap! I s'pose you think you'll cut us off from gettin' supplies, don't you? Well, we filled the oil-tank about an hour ago, an' our engineer says that will last three or four days. When we want more, I reckon it won't be a very hard job to get it without comin' anywhere near Whitehall."

"That settles our chance of ever getting hold of her," Ned whispered, mournfully.

"Don't give up so easily. We've just started on this thing, and before it's ended perhaps he won't be able to crow so loud. Buckle down to your oars, and don't let's fool with them any longer."

Ned obeyed, and as the boys began to pull away, Bill cried, mockingly:

"Now don't be in sich a hurry! I was gettin' ready to have a social talk with you."

"We've heard enough, and the next time

there's any talking done, it'll be in a different way."

"Fix it to suit yourselves. Don't let me disturb you!" Bill cried, and Sam added:

"Might as well take this thing easy, fellers, an' come down to our terms. It'll be better all around, an' then you won't have the trouble of chasin' us, for you can't catch this craft if you work at it from now till next fall."

"Don't make any answer," Roy whispered. "It's bad enough to lose the yacht without staying here where they can poke fun at us."

Bill did not intend that the boys whom he had wronged should part company with him so readily.

As they rode away he turned the yacht, and running at half speed, circled around and around them, while he and Sam taunted and jeered as if their greatest pleasure was in goading the boys to anger.

Roy kept his head bent that he might not see the fellows who had done him such an in-

jury, and cautioned his brother from time to time to remain silent.

"Don't please them by breaking out!" he whispered. "They will hang close to us until we get pretty near Whitehall, and we must be quiet."

"But the worst of it is that we can't help ourselves," Ned wailed. "They have already taken on board such stores as were needed, and it probably won't make any difference to them if they shouldn't be able to land for a month."

"Perhaps when we get home, father will have some plan."

"We should have waited to see him before we left."

"But we didn't, and now we will go on as we have started."

When they were within half a mile of the steamboat landing, Bill shouted once more, and this time in a serious tone:

"Remember what I told you! The minute you agree me an' Sam are partners, you can

come aboard. Better take up with the offer now, for I don't know as it'll hold good to-morrow."

"You needn't wait around expecting us to do anything of the kind," Roy replied, speaking for the first time to the pirates since he had begun to pull for the town. "I wouldn't do it the day Mr. Sampson sold us the yacht, and now no amount of money could hire me to go in with you as a partner."

"I reckon you'll think different about that before long; but I don't know as it makes any difference. Try chasin' us for awhile, and then perhaps you'll change your mind."

"I'd rather you kept the boat, than get her back on such terms as you offer!" Roy cried, and by this time the yacht was so near the pier that Bill thought it advisable to put the "Gem" about.

CHAPTER V

A CONSULTATION

BILL DEAN was in the best of spirits when, in obedience to her helm, the little steamer swung gracefully around, and was under full speed up the lake again, as her rightful owners landed near the steamboat dock.

He did not seem to consider he had committed a crime in thus stealing the "Gem," and was quite confident he could evade any pursuit which might be begun through the agency of Roy and Ned.

In strict justice to Bill it should be said that he did not really look upon the seizing of the steamer as a theft. It was to him as if Mr. Sampson had turned her over to the boys of Lake Champlain generally, and that Roy and Ned had come into possession simply because they were the first to take advantage of the opportunity; not through an absolute transfer of the little craft.

That the authorities of Whitehall, or of any other town, would make an effort to capture them, Bill did not believe, and for the reasons given. In his opinion he had shown himself a very good general in getting possession of the yacht for the purpose of forcing Ned and Roy to a compromise, and there was no question in his mind but that he could, in due course of time, accomplish his purpose.

It was destined Master Dean should discover very soon that he was not as completely the captain of the "Gem" as he fancied.

After the little craft was run up the lake four or five miles, the helmsman discovered that the steam had suddenly been shut off.

"What's the matter down there?" he cried through the speaking-tube, and the engineer answered readily, but not in a tone savoring of respect:

"I want to have a talk with you fellers, an' it aint well to let her go ahead at full speed while that's bein' done."

"Start her up again. I want to put into

a cove up here a bit, for it aint certain but that them chumps may run across a tug-boat, an' try to make trouble for us."

"I intend to hold on where we are," was the decided reply, and an instant later Master Tracey appeared on the forward deck.

It seemed to Bill as if the time had come when he should exercise his authority, and as the mutinously-inclined engineer appeared, he asked, angrily:

"Look here! Be you goin' to do the engineerin' of this yacht, or not?"

"I haven't made up my mind yet. That's what we are to talk about."

Bill looked at his new acquaintance in surprise. That there could be any difference of opinion on this particular point, and so soon after the cruise had begun, perplexed him.

"I want you to understand I'm the captain of this crowd, an' what I say goes. If you don't want to tend to the engine, jest say the word, an' I'll get somebody what's willin' to obey orders."

"You can find some one else jest as soon as you've a mind to. I'm ready to go ashore any minute."

Now Bill was alarmed as well as surprised.

"Do you mean to say you want to back out of this job?"

"If you're goin' to put on so many airs, I reckon I do; but there's one thing certain, I don't count on runnin' this boat for you till affairs are settled my way."

"What's the matter? What's up?" Sam cried, coming from the after-cabin as he heard the threatening tones of the engineer.

"Nothing very much," Tom Tracey said calmly, "only I've got jest as far on this cruise as I count on goin' till things are settled."

"Why don't you tell us what it is you want?" Bill asked, impatiently.

"That won't take a great while. You stole this craft, an' if you hang 'round here as you count on doin', it won't be many hours before the officers are after you in a tug-boat. Then

the jig will soon be up, an' we shall find ourselves in jail for stealin'."

"I'll take care of that part of it," Bill said, loftily. "Don't you be afraid. I'll see you through all right."

"That is jest why I am afraid, because you think you can do what you can't. You aint got as much sense as a two-weeks-old baby, when it comes to carryin' out a job like this."

The flush on Bill's face told that his surprise was giving way to anger.

"How do you know what I can do?" he cried, sharply.

"I know what you have done, an' how you count on keepin' possession of this yacht, which is enough for me. Now, I'm willin' to go ashore, an' let you get another engineer, or things must be run my way."

"What is your way?" Sam asked, in a conciliatory tone.

"To put just as many miles as possible between us and Whitehall before night. If we hang round here, there's no question but that

we'll be caught, but what's to hinder runnin' through the canal into the Hudson River, and then down to New York, or anywhere we want to go? It'll be a regular picnic, an' one that will last jest as long as you please."

"But I don't want to stay away from home any very great while," Sam said, in sudden alarm.

"I reckon what you've done will keep you away a good spell, even if you go straight back to Whitehall this minute, for it's likely those fellers will give information to the sheriff, an' as soon as you turn up, you'll be nabbed."

"You don't think the sheriff will pay any attention to what they say, do you?" and Sam looked as if he felt very uncomfortable.

"Of course he will. That's his business. You've stolen this yacht, and I don't know but what they could call you pirates, an' hang you for it, so the best thing to be done is to get away as quick as you can."

"How long do you want to stay down around New York?" Bill asked, almost timidly.

"It don't make any difference to me if I never come back."

"But I thought you was workin' in Saratoga?"

"It might be that things was as hot in Saratoga for me as they will be in Whitehall for you," Tom replied, in a meaning tone, and then added, more sternly, "it don't make any difference whether I want to get back or not. The question for you to decide is, whether you are willin' to go on with what you've begun, or are ready to stand an arrest. Talk the matter over during the next ten minutes, an' then tell me what you have made up your mind to do, because I don't allow to be on board this craft an hour from now, unless we're headin' south, an' goin' at a pretty good speed, too."

Then the young gentleman from Saratoga went into the engine-room, leaving Bill and Sam gazing at each other in mute dismay.

"Do you s'pose we do stand a chance of bein' arrested?" the latter asked, in a tone which was far from firm.

"It begins to look like it, 'cordin' to the way that feller talks, though I don't know how they can figger it out, when we told Ned an' Roy we was only holdin' her till they was willin' to make a trade."

"Never mind what you told them," Tracey cried from below. "You stole the yacht, an' that's all there is about it."

Bill did not fancy the idea of discussing the situation while they were where their new acquaintance could overhear the conversation, and he beckoned Sam to come into the wheel-house, saying in a whisper as the latter entered:

"That feller's makin' himself out too big, an' the sooner we put him ashore the better."

"And are we to go too?" Sam asked, timidly.

"Not unless we want to find ourselves in jail, for I'm afraid that's what it would amount to, if we showed up in town."

"Then how will you run the steamer?"

Bill looked absolutely distressed. In his anger he had not thought of the unpleasant fact that they were at the mercy of this amateur

engineer, unless they could find some one to replace him, and at present that would be impossible if the yacht were not put back to Whitehall.

During fully a minute not a word was spoken, and then Bill said, with a long-drawn sigh:

"I don't see but what we shall have to keep him, an' do as he says."

"Look here! I didn't count on havin' reg'larly to run away from home."

"Neither did I. We've kinder got ourselves into a scrape, an' it's no use talkin' about what we want to do. Come to think the matter over, I guess Tom Tracey is right, an' the sooner we get away from Whitehall the better. If the sheriff does come after us, it'll be in a tug-boat, an' it won't take long to overhaul this craft. What do you think? Shall we go ahead?"

"I don't want to; but yet I'd do most anything rather than go to jail. I was sure Ned and Roy would come to our terms, when they found we'd got the boat."

"So was I; but that's where we made a mis-

take, an' now we've got to get out of it the best way we can. Shall I tell Tracey we'll do as he wants us to do?"

"Yes; if you don't see any other plan," Sam said, despondently, and then, as if he had no further interest in what had, but a short time previous, promised to be such a glorious lark, he went sadly into the after-cabin to think over the disagreeable situation which had so suddenly presented itself.

"Hey! Tom!" Bill cried, through the speaking-tube.

"Well, what is it?" came the reply in no very friendly tone.

"S'posen you tell me just what you count on doin'?"

"Will you agree to it, or do you only want to find out before you set me ashore?"

"It looks to me as if we'd got to do pretty nigh as you say, for it aint safe to run back to Whitehall."

"It won't take long to find out whether it is or not."

"But I don't care to run the chances, an' it's only fair you should tell us what you want done."

"You agree to do as I say from this time out?"

Bill hesitated only an instant before he replied:

"Yes; it don't look as if we could help ourselves, an' the sooner we get away from here the better."

The engineer's statement that they were in danger of arrest because of what had been done, caused the amateur pirates no slight amount of alarm, and already they fancied the sheriff, in one of the fastest tugs to be found on the lake, was in pursuit of the yacht.

Tom Tracey, satisfied that his companions were in a proper frame of mind to serve his purpose, now threw off the injured air which he had seen fit to assume, and came on deck looking very friendly.

"The matter stands just like this, Bill," he said in a kindly, confidential tone, "the sheriff

is bound to come after us sooner or later, and I shall be in the same box with you if the steamer is overhauled. Now by goin' through the canal into the Hudson River, an' then to New York, we can have the jolliest kind of a time, an' keep it up as long as we have a mind."

"But do you know the way there?"

"Any chump could sail a craft there. We can't go astray in the canal, nor in the river, so what's to hinder? Once as far away as that, nobody can find us."

"Then the sooner you start her up, the better —but hold on a minute!" he cried, as Tom turned to go below. "They'll charge us something for goin' through the canal, an' I haven't but thirty cents to my name."

"I'll take care of that part of it. I've got fifty dollars."

"Fifty dollars!" Bill exclaimed, for the sum seemed to him, who never had as much as a dollar in his possession at any one time, to be something enormous. "Where did you get it?"

"Never mind that part of it. I don't want

to go back to Saratoga, so I'm willin' to put out what cash is needed, as long as you go ahead, an' do what I say."

Bill's misgivings vanished instantly. With a companion who had such a very large amount of money, there seemed to be no reason why the amateur pirates should not have the jolliest cruise possible. He put far from his mind any thought of what might be the ending of the voyage, and was ready to enjoy himself to the utmost.

During the conversation the little steamer had been drifting to and fro with the currents, but in a few moments after Tom and Bill had arrived at an understanding, she was steaming ahead at full speed, her sharp prow sending up spray in the sunlight like a shower of diamonds, and giving promise to those who held her in unlawful possession of bearing them quickly away from such representatives of the law as might come in pursuit.

Bill's spirits arose as the yacht gathered headway, and, shouting loudly, he summoned Sam from the cabin.

To his companion he explained the situation, as it appeared to him, at great length, and so far succeeded in quieting the latter's fears, that before the entrance to the canal was reached, both the amateur pirates were in a comparatively happy frame of mind.

That Tom Tracey was a valuable addition to the party could be seen immediately they stopped at the dock, for, without hesitation, he leaped on shore, and in a most business-like manner proceeded to make arrangements for a passage through the canal, paying the price charged with the air of one accustomed to such voyages.

"Going far?" the lock-tender asked.

"Only down into the river on a sort of excursion," Tom replied, carelessly.

"Aint that the yacht Mr. Sampson has had hauled up out of water pretty nigh ever since he bought her?"

"The same one."

"I heard as how the Barclay boys made some kind of a dicker, an' was goin' to run her around the Lake this summer."

"So they did. I've hired her for a couple of days, and, in order to get the value of my money, can't afford to spend very much time chinnin' with you."

"You'll spend more'n two days if you count on goin' to the river an' back," the man said, with a drawl. "Accordin' to the rules of this 'ere canal, no craft is allowed to make more than three miles an hour."

"But s'pose we should make a mistake, an' do better than that?"

"You'd stand a chance of bein' held back at the other end; but I don't reckon there'll be any trouble, for you'll find it's a good bit different runnin' them small steamers through here, than it would be in open water."

Then, having satisfied his curiosity, the lock-tender set about making preparations to let them through, and his movements were so deliberate that the amateur pirates grew decidedly nervous lest the young owners of the "Gem" should come up before they had succeeded in leaving the waters of the lake.

"I wish you'd put us in there as soon as you can," Tom said, anxiously. "If we're not allowed to run more than three miles an hour, we oughtn't spend any more time here than is absolutely necessary."

"You're gettin' on jest as fast as if you was twice as big, an' of a good deal more importance," the man replied, with a grin, not accelerating his movements in the least.

Neither Bill nor Sam understood how to handle the yacht in a lock; but Tom took full charge of the matter, and, thanks to his skill, the "Gem" sustained no injury, although tossed furiously about by the incoming flood.

"What's the reason they don't allow us to run as fast as we can?" Bill asked, before they were yet in the canal.

"There is always some such regulation in this kind of traveling. It is to prevent the washin' of the bank by the screw of the boat. It needn't interfere with us, though, for there isn't much chance those fellers would send any one

after us until to-morrow, an' I allow we've got all the time we need."

"But the lock-tender knew the boat, and if the Barclay boys come down this way, they'll know jest where we've gone."

"That is to be expected; but we are ahead of them, an' they can't travel any faster than the yacht does. There isn't much chance either of them will think of huntin' for us in this direction before noon, an' then we shall have six or seven hours the start. If that isn't enough, I don't know what is."

"Now you can get out," the lock-tender cried, as he opened the gate, "and I don't reckon you've lost a great deal of money because you didn't go through sooner."

"We sha'n't cry on account of bein' obliged to tear ourselves away from your charmin' society," Tom said, sarcastically, and the crew of the "Gem" took their respective stations.

Bill entered the wheel-house; the engineer went below, and soon the little craft was steaming onward, showing conclusively that it was

not possible for her to break the rule of the canal relative to fast running.

Owing to the drag of the waters and the narrow channel, three miles an hour was as great speed as Tom Tracey could force the yacht into; but in view of the fact that it was hardly probable they would be pursued during this day, the amateur pirates were not particularly disturbed because of the slow progress.

Sam acted as steward, so far as overhauling the provisions and serving dinner was concerned, and it was yet early in the afternoon when Tom Tracey came on deck and said to the helmsman:

"When you strike a wide place in the canal, I wish you'd make fast to the bank."

"What for?"

"This engine hasn't been run for a long while, an' isn't in the best of condition. Some of the bearings are gettin' heated already, an' it is time they were overhauled."

"But what if them fellers should come along?"

"There's precious little show of their gettin' down this way before to-morrow, an', besides, it's better to stop an hour now, than find ourselves stuck fast in such a shape that no one but a regular machinist could get us out of the scrape."

Bill made no reply, and the engineer went below, satisfied that his wishes would be complied with at the earliest practicable moment.

Half an hour later the helmsman shouted through the speaking-tube:

"There is a wide space jest ahead; it looks like an old basin. If you still believe we've got to stop, come on deck an' see what you think of it."

Tom obeyed the summons, and said as he looked at the broad surface of water, several times wider than the main channel:

"I reckon this will answer our purpose. Run her over toward the right-hand bank where we'll be out of the path of other boats, an' in half an hour we'll be ready to go on again."

"Do you s'pose the water is deep enough?"

"How much does the yacht draw?"

"I don't know; but she can't need very much, for I heard old Sampson say once that she could run on a heavy dew."

"Then make a try for it," and at full speed the 'Gem' dashed toward the opposite bank, only to come to a sudden stop before fifty feet had been traversed.

"We're aground!" Bill said in a matter-of-fact tone, and instead of stopping the screw immediately, the amateur engineer stood gazing about him in perplexity, while each moment the "Gem" was forcing her keel deeper and deeper into the mud.

CHAPTER VI

A DISAPPOINTMENT

Not until several moments had elapsed after the little yacht struck the bottom, did Tom Tracey realize how essential it was to stop the revolutions of the screw, and then, with a muttered exclamation of impatience because of his own stupidity, he ran quickly into the engine-room.

"It isn't our fault if she hasn't gone up on the shoal high and dry," he said as he pulled the lever and reversed the motion of the screw, while Bill and Sam stood helplessly by with no idea of what should be done.

They were fairly good yachtsmen, in their own opinion, at least, while everything was working smoothly; but the slightest mishap plunged both into such a maze of bewilderment as to prevent either from being of any service.

"Well, how do you count on gettin' her

off?" Tom Tracey asked as, his portion of the work having been done, he naturally turned to the alleged captain for some command or suggestion.

"I don't know," Bill replied, frankly, and then, as if a happy thought had occurred to him, he added, "do you s'pose it would be any use for all hands to push?"

"If the screw won't help her, I don't fancy we could do a great deal in that direction; but it might not be any harm to try it. What have we got for poles?"

"There's a couple pair of oars in the tender," Bill replied, making no motion toward getting them.

"Well, let's have them up here. Do you and Sam intend to stand around like bumps on a log, an' leave me to do all the work?"

The question was asked in an angry tone, which had the effect of arousing both the amateur pirates to a realization of their responsibilities, and without further loss of time they set about making preparations to relieve the

"Gem" from the hold which the mud had upon her.

It was not an easy task to repair the mischief which had been wrought through carelessness.

During fully an hour the boys worked energetically, but without apparent success, and at the end of that time Sam and Bill had come to the conclusion that there was too much solid work in the sport of yachting to render it desirable as a recreation.

Then it was that a canal-boat propelled by steam, came up the channel, and as she crept slowly past, over the sluggish waters, Bill said, enviously:

"I wish we were on board of her goin' home, an' never had been fools enough to think of tryin' to run a craft like this, that runs aground every time she has a chance."

"Well, you're not on board of her, an' you can't go home without a precious good show of goin' to jail, so the best thing you can do is to realize what mischief may be done us by those on board that steamer."

"What do you mean?" Bill asked, in blank amazement. "How can they do us any harm?"

"I s'pose you'll allow they saw us?" Tom said, sarcastically.

"Of course they did."

"And what do you think will be the result when they reach Whitehall, an' learn that the 'Gem' has been stolen?"

"You aint countin' that they'll come back here and catch us, are you?"

"Well, if ever I met a thicker-headed boy than you, I didn't know it," the amateur engineer said in a tone very nearly approaching disgust.

"Of course they won't come back after us; but some of them will be likely to give information as to where we are, an' then, I reckon, the sheriff will find a craft that can go as fast as this, without much trouble. Besides, it will be known now for a certainty that we're headin' for the Hudson River, an' orders will be sent to Albany to arrest us the minute we show up."

By this time Bill had begun to understand

how much mischief might be made for him by those on board the steamer, and he danced around and around the deck in a perfect frenzy of fear, alternately pushing vainly with the oars, and hauling the little tender alongside as if to use her as a means of escape.

"Well, now, what are you up to?" Tom asked, angrily. "Do you think you're goin' to make matters any better by flyin' 'round in that style."

"It won't do to stay here another minute," Bill cried, excitedly. "If we can't get this yacht off the mud we must leave her. What's to prevent our goin' in the tender whenever we like?"

"Nothing; only I don't fancy leavin' a craft like this to take to a small boat, where we've got to row all the time."

"It's better to do that than stay here an' be caught," Sam whined.

"I'll admit you're right; but at the same time we aint in any immediate danger. That steamer won't arrive at Whitehall for two hours,

an' it'll be as much longer before information is given regardin' us. Then the sheriff has got to come the same road we did, an' I'll allow there's precious little chance of being nabbed to-night."

"Well," Bill asked, angrily, "are you goin' to hold on here for that to happen? If we start off now, there's some show of givin' them the slip, an' that's a heap better than waitin' till they arrest us."

"Now look here, my brave pirate, you may be able to steal a yacht, but when it comes to tryin' to keep possession of her, you don't seem to have any sense whatever. Take hold here with me. Let's set about this work properly, an' see if we can float her. When we're satisfied that isn't possible, it'll be time enough to run away in the small boat, but not before."

"It strikes me we've done all that could be done."

"And it strikes me you're a fool!" Tom replied, as he began measuring the depth of water from the yacht's deck, to ascertain at which point she was most firmly held by the mud.

While those who had stolen the yacht were working industriously to retain the fruits of their crime, the "Gem's" lawful owners were by no means idle.

Immediately upon landing, after the brief interview with the pirates, Roy and Ned reported the condition of affairs to their father, and he at once set about aiding them to recover their property.

When the proper authorities had been notified of the theft, Mr. Barclay announced his determination to go directly to Ticonderoga.

"But Bill and Sam are at this end of the lake," Roy suggested, "and it seems to me we should look for them around here."

"It isn't likely they'll stay in this vicinity a great while, for they must know that in such case their capture would be only a question of time," Mr. Barclay replied. "If they once get past Ticonderoga, it is possible to give you the slip, and, in my opinion, that's the proper place to look for the yacht. I'll go there, and you may keep watch here."

"But what shall we do in case we find the 'Gem'?" Ned asked.

"If you overhaul them where there is an officer of the law, their arrest can be easily effected."

"But suppose we don't?"

"Then there's no other course than to keep on their track until you come up with them where assistance may be obtained."

Mr. Barclay was so positive the amateur pirates would go up the lake, instead of trusting to the chance of reaching the Hudson River through the canal that he did not deem it of importance to make any more definite plan as to what should be done in the way of regaining the stolen property, and without loss of time started for the railroad station, leaving his sons to continue the pursuit in any way they might think best.

Roy and Ned, knowing that an engineer who evidently understood how to run the machinery was on board the "Gem," despaired of ever again getting possession of the little craft.

They were wholly at a loss to know what should be done, and wandered aimlessly around the town, as if believing there they might gain assistance. To pull up and down the Lake in a row-boat seemed useless, for they would have but little chance of boarding the yacht, even in case they should sight her again, and this ignorance of exactly what should be done proved fortunate for them.

Without any idea of receiving information, they were on the pier when the steam-barge arrived, and there, quite by chance, overheard the captain tell a friend that he had passed Mr. Sampson's yacht "aground in the old basin."

"Now is our chance!" Roy exclaimed, triumphantly. "We'll go to the sheriff, and notify him where the 'Gem' is."

Both the boys believed the authorities would be quite as eager to recapture the stolen property as they were, and therefore felt decidedly disappointed when the deputy to whom they told their story replied, carelessly:

"I don't see as you have gained anything in

that direction, lads, except as it shows where the thieves are bound. Most likely they're afloat and under way again by this time, so it would be useless expense and trouble to go there now. The best plan is to telegraph down the canal, so they can be stopped at one of the locks. I'll attend to that matter at once."

"Can't you send somebody after her?" Ned asked, entreatingly. "It isn't certain but that they will be in the river before your telegrams arrive."

"It would only be a waste of time and money. We'll get hold of her before long, now we know in what direction they are goin', so all you have to do is to wait patiently."

This was the most difficult task which could have been set the boys.

After leaving the sheriff's office they did their best to follow the deputy's advice, but without avail, and finally Roy said, as if seized by a sudden idea:

"It isn't likely father will get back from Ticonderoga before to-morrow at the earliest."

"No," Ned replied, mournfully, "and while he's waiting there Bill and Sam will have plenty of time in which to escape, for I don't believe the sheriff intends to do very much toward capturing the yacht."

"And the old basin isn't more than six miles from here."

"Yes," Ned replied, with a sigh. "If one of the deputies would start off this minute, he could have the 'Gem' back here by sunset."

"It is evident they won't stir themselves very lively; but that is no reason why we should stay here sucking our thumbs. What's to prevent our going down the tow-path?"

Ned looked at his brother an instant in surprise, and then exclaimed, much as if the whole plan had been explained in detail:

"That's the very thing, Roy! We'll start at once. If the little craft is yet aground, with a chance for us to board her, I'll answer for it that we get possession again. I don't know how big the engineer may be; but if you'll take care of

him, I'll agree to keep Bill and Sam from doing any mischief."

"I wasn't exactly counting on making a rough-and-tumble fight of it," Roy replied, thoughtfully; "but if that should be necessary, I reckon we could give a decently good account of ourselves. We haven't any time to lose, however. Let's run back to the house, tell mother where we are going, and get away as soon as possible."

"It seems like a great waste of time to go home, for that will take an hour at the very least."

"I know it; but yet we have no business to go away without telling mother. It may be necessary to stay two or three days."

"Of course you are right, and I don't want to leave without her knowing it. I was only thinking that while we were going home, the thieves might float the yacht and get safely away."

"That is true," Roy replied, gravely; "but yet it can't be helped. At all events, there is no

need of wasting our time here talking about it. Come on, let us see how quickly we can get back."

The boys were so excited by the prospect of regaining their property unaided, that no other provision for the journey was made than to acquaint Mrs. Barclay with their destination, and leave a message for their father.

In less than two hours from the time the information had been given by the captain of the steam-barge, they were at the first lock, and there were hailed by the inquisitive lock-tender who had assisted the thieves in getting through.

"I reckon you boys are countin' on makin' your everlasting fortune now you've bought Sampson's yacht?" he said, with the customary drawl.

"It don't look much that way just now," Roy replied, bitterly.

"Don't, eh? Why you haven't had her in the water more'n twenty-four hours, an' found a chance to let her for two days already. If you don't call that good business, I'm afraid you'll never be suited."

"Did the fellers who were on board say they had hired her?"

"Sure. Aint it so?"

"Not much. They have stolen her, and we are trying to catch them," Roy replied, as he pushed ahead nervously.

"Well, by Jeems Rice! I kinder thought the chap what bossed the job was too free with his tongue to be honest," the lock-tender muttered, and he would have questioned the boys regarding the theft but that they were no longer within sound of his voice.

Not until fully one-half the journey to the point where the yacht was reported to be aground had been traversed did either of the pursuers speak, and then Ned said, with a long-drawn sigh:

"It will be dark before we get to the basin."

"So much the better for us, if the 'Gem' is still aground."

"I have almost given over expecting to see her at the basin. When we arrive, eight or ten hours will have elapsed from the time those on

the barge saw her, and if there had been no other accident than running aground, she should be afloat before this."

"That isn't positive. If she ran any distance on the soft mud, she would hold there firmly, and getting her off might prove to be a long job. At all events, there is no reason why we shouldn't look on the bright side, and I am going to believe the little craft is still there, until convinced to the contrary."

Then followed another long time of silence, and before it was broken night had come.

"Have you decided what we shall do if the 'Gem' is really there?" Ned finally asked.

"No; there will be time enough to make up our minds when we find them. Don't let's talk, for there's no telling where those fellows may be, and we mustn't let them know what we're about, if it can be prevented."

The night was dark; the stars obscured by clouds, and the pursuers found no little difficulty in keeping to the beaten track. A misstep to either side would precipitate them into

the waters of the canal on one hand, or the morass on the other, and it was well they gave undivided attention to the path beneath their feet.

At the end of half an hour a tiny glow of light could be seen in the distance ahead, slightly to the right, and Roy whispered triumphantly:

"They haven't floated the little craft yet, and now, Ned, if we don't make a mistake she will soon be ours again."

Ned did not venture to reply, but pressed his brother's arm firmly to show he was willing to brave any danger in order to accomplish their purpose, and, an instant later, Roy halted, with a half-suppressed cry of disappointment.

"We have got here only in time to see her get under way again!" he exclaimed. "They have either just floated her, or been waiting until the canal-boats were tied up for the night. See, that light is moving now!"

It was not necessary Ned should gaze very long in order to understand the truth of the assertion.

Slowly at first, and then faster, the glow of light moved, to come to a stop after a short interval, when, as could well be fancied, the yacht was turning from the basin into the main canal. Then it sped forward like a will-o'-the-wisp, until lost to view in the distance.

"That settles it!" Ned said, with a groan. "They can run now until stopped by a bridge, but there may not be one within a dozen miles!"

Roy was despondently watching the glow of light until his brother spoke, and then it was as if the words acted as does a spur upon a jaded steed.

"We won't give it up, at all events! It isn't so certain they can go many miles, and at the first bridge or lock the yacht must haul up until morning, for there is no passing after sunset. Come on, Ned, don't stop to think that you may be tired; but only remember there is a chance to overhaul them now, and, unless we take advantage of it, we may never see the 'Gem' again."

"Go ahead. I'll follow as long as you can.

Don't miss any chances; but keep on while there is the least show of overtaking them."

Then Ned pressed forward in advance of his brother, to show his determination not to be overcome by fatigue, and the two trudged along in silence, although pursuit seemed well-nigh hopeless.

CHAPTER VII

A FAILURE

THE work of floating the "Gem" proved more difficult than either of the amateur pirates had at first supposed.

Owing to the fact that her screw was allowed to revolve so long after the keel touched the bottom, she had been driven up on the shoal as far as steam could force her, and when Tom Tracey measured the depth of water to ascertain in which direction the channel lay, he learned that it would be impossible to go any further toward the right-hand side of the basin.

"We were fools to push in here without sounding," he said, angrily, after making his investigations.

"Why?" Bill asked, innocently.

"Because if we had done so we wouldn't have tried to sail a yacht drawin' fifteen inches or more, in water less than half a foot deep.

We must get back in the channel, an' look for another stoppin' place further on."

"There seems to be water enough aft."

"Yes, and that is the only direction in which we can make any progress. It's a case of bringin' every movable thing aft, in order to lighten the bows. Then we'll get on a full head of steam, set the screw runnin' backward, and, with the tender, do our best to yank her off. If that fails to float her, it will be time to leave this place at the fastest gait possible."

If Bill and Sam had been left alone it is more than probable they would have abandoned the yacht when she first struck bottom; but Tom had no intention of losing the fruits of their crime if it could be avoided, and kept them steadily at work until sunset, when everything was in readiness for the final attempt.

The task was accomplished at last; but before arrangements could be made for continuing the journey, or the flight, whichever it should be called, the lights of a boat could be seen in the distance.

"There comes some kind of a craft from Whitehall, an' we must wait till she has passed," Tom said, in a low tone as he extinguished the lanterns.

"But suppose the sheriff should be on board."

"In case any one has started after us, we shall be no safer in advance than here, for we should be stopped at the next lock. Our wisest plan is to hold on where we are. If the boat slows up we shall know an officer has come, an' can strike out for a journey across the country. If she doesn't stop we are safe for another twenty-four hours at the least, and by that time we should be near the Hudson River, where the smartest of them will have hard work to find us."

The "Gem" had not been injured by having come in contact with the mud-bank, and once the lights of the canal-boat disappeared in the distance, Tom Tracey, who had already assumed the position of captain, ordered his companions to their posts.

"Sam, you are to stay in the engine-room.

There is nothing to be done while we are running, save to see that the bearings are well oiled, and Bill will stand at the helm."

"What are *you* goin' to do?" Master Dean asked, in a petulant tone.

"Keep a general look-out for everything. A fellow must be wide awake when he has two such chumps as you for a crew."

On the day previous Bill would have resented hotly any such remark; but the experiences of the past twenty-four hours had been sufficient to reduce him to complete subjection. Stealing a yacht had not proven to be quite the lark he fancied, and he realized that a more experienced person than either himself or Sam was required, if they would retain their freedom.

Sam was even more meek than his partner. He had but little confidence in Bill's ability to prevent their falling into the clutches of the law, and strongly suspected Tom Tracey would abandon them whenever it should serve his purpose, therefore Master Huntley could not but believe that the final ending of what had been intended

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as a sort of pleasure excursion would be the jail at Whitehall.

Because of the generally unsatisfactory condition of affairs, the two who had stolen the yacht readily and silently obeyed the boy whom they had taken on board as an assistant, and over the dark channel the little craft glided along as swiftly as the drag of the water would permit, while, in the rear, traveling at nearly as great speed, were the rightful owners.

More than once did the yacht strike the shoals near either bank, owing to the inability of the helmsman to distinguish objects in the gloom, and there seemed every danger she would soon be hard and fast aground again.

"What's the matter with you?" Tom asked, angrily. "Don't you know enough to keep in the middle of the canal?"

"I may know enough; but how's a feller to steer while it's so dark?"

"It would be a serious matter to get stuck here, for its pretty certain the owners of the yacht will come along by to-morrow."

"I want to get into the river as badly as you; but can't do any better than this. I believe it would pay to tie up somewhere till mornin'."

Perhaps Tom would have insisted that they continue as far as the next lock before stopping, if at that moment the "Gem" had not struck the bottom with a blow more violent than before, and as he reeled from the effect of the shock he asked, nervously:

"Isn't there a settlement near?"

"The town of Comstock can't be very far away."

"We'll haul up there till day-break."

"It will be jest as well, for we couldn't get through the next lock even if we were there this minute."

Half an hour later the lights of the village could be seen in the distance, and Tom reduced the speed one-half, saying as he came on deck again, "There is no reason why we should go very near the town. We'll stop whenever we find something that will answer as a wharf."

"The embankment timbers run down this way quite a bit; most likely we can see them now if we pull in on the right-hand side."

"Give her a sheer that way, and stand by to swing off if she touches."

As he spoke the engineer went forward, peering out into the gloom, and under his guidance the "Gem" was soon made fast to a structure built in the bank, where canal-boats could discharge their cargoes.

Half an hour later everything had been made snug for the night. The lights were extinguished; the awnings taken down lest even in the darkness they should attract attention, and the amateur pirates were receiving such satisfaction as was possible from a cold lunch in the after cabin.

"I reckon you fellers are known 'round these parts?" Tom said, in a tone of inquiry, as he finished his portion of the rather unpalatable meal.

"We've been here two or three times."

"Well, I never was in this section of the

country before, so it won't be takin a great risk if I go into the town."

"Why do you want to go there?"

"To buy provisions. It won't be safe to call at Troy or Albany, and we must have a good supply of grub if we count on knockin' around the river very long. I'll see what can be done, an' while I'm away you fellers must keep out of sight. Don't show your noses on deck till I come back."

With this parting injunction, which sounded very much like a threat, the engineer went on shore, and the two who were responsible for the misfortune which had befallen Roy and Ned were left alone.

It was several moments before either of the amateur pirates spoke, and then Sam broke the almost painful silence:

"If he's goin' to do the bossin' we sha'n't get much fun out of this scrape."

"That's a fact," was the emphatic reply, "an' yet I don't see how we're goin' to help ourselves. He's got money enough to keep us

goin' a good while, an' if it wasn't for him we'd have to give in as soon as the oil is used up."

"Perhaps that would be jest as well," Sam replied, in a tone of desperation. "We can't keep on sailin' forever, an' when we do stop, it's a case of goin' to jail. What fools we was to get into sich a scrape!"

"You're right; but who'd thought it would turn out this way? I allowed when Roy an' Ned saw we'd got the yacht, they'd be willin' to make whatever trade we said, but now—"

"Now we're workin' to keep Tom Tracey outer jail, where he oughter be for what he did in Saratoga."

"How do you know he did anything crooked there?"

"I don't, for a dead fact, but it looks as if somethin' was wrong, else what was he doin' on the lake so early in the year, an' how does he happen to have so much as fifty dollars?"

"It don't look straight."

"Of course it doesn't. Everybody in Whitehall who saw him, said it wouldn't be long

before he'd be brought up with a round turn, an' now we're in about the same box."

The amateur pirates were thoroughly sorry because of having stolen the "Gem;" but neither had the moral courage to suggest that they return to Whitehall and there submit to whatever punishment the law could inflict, therefore they waited in silence the return of their late assistant, who had assumed the leadership of the expedition.

An hour elapsed before Tom made his appearance, and then there was an expression of anxiety on his face which had not been visible when he started for the town.

That he had done considerable shopping could be seen from the number of packages, which formed quite a serious burden, and he dropped them on the locker with the air of one who feels relief at being free from an incumbrance.

"I reckon we won't lay here till mornin'," he said, nervously, looking out of the companionway as he spoke.

"Why? What's the matter?" Sam asked, excitedly.

"Don't yell so loud, unless you want everybody to know we're here!" and Tom closed the hatch. "When I was comin' down the towpath I saw some feller skulkin' around the yacht, and it aint any way certain we haven't been followed sooner than I allowed."

"But the sheriff couldn't get here so quick. He would have to come on a boat, an' we know he hasn't done that—"

"He might have been in the one that went past us just after sunset, an' counts on catchin' us at the lock."

Bill and Sam looked thoroughly alarmed.

"Some one is hangin' 'round the yacht, for a fact, an' we must be on our guard; but that isn't all the bad news. The sheriff has been telegraphin' along the canal that Sampson's steamer is missin', an' some fool will try to stop us, if we lay here till mornin'."

"Then the sooner we get under way the better!" Bill exclaimed, as he leaped to his feet.

"Now, don't make a fool of yourself," Tom said, roughly. "It won't do to start until after midnight, an' when the right minute comes you can bet we sha'n't lose any time."

Bill sat down again, and both he and Sam appeared distressed in mind. The fact that Tom, who until now had been confident of being able to go where he pleased, was evidently alarmed, frightened him as nothing save the actual presence of the officers could have done.

"How did you find out about the telegraph?" Sam finally asked, in a tremulous voice.

"Heard the men in the stores talkin' about it, of course. At the first shop I weakened, an' got out; but it was the same wherever I went. We needed provisions, so I took the chances of buyin' what was wanted. They allow we'll come along some time to-morrow, an' are goin' to try to stop us. If anybody should discover that the yacht was here, I reckon we shouldn't have a chance to sleep on board."

"Then it seems to me we oughtn't to lose any time in startin'," Bill said, gloomily.

"They couldn't stop us after we was under way."

"It wouldn't be much of a job to ride along the bank to the lock, and most likely the man in charge there has been notified to prevent us from goin' through."

"Then we're stuck here for a fact."

"I don't give in so easy, though it looks a good deal like that. At first there didn't seem to be any way out; but after thinkin' the matter over, I've hit on a plan I reckon can be worked all right. If it fails we sha'n't be any worse off than we are now, an' shall be jest so much nearer the river. If nothin' better shows up, we can give them the slip by takin' to the tender."

"What's the plan?" Bill asked, listlessly.

"I'm allowin' to reach the lock in the gray of the mornin', when the man there won't be more than half awake—"

Tracey ceased speaking very suddenly, and leaned toward the companionway to listen.

He had heard suspicious noises outside and,

a moment later, became satisfied pursuers were near.

"There's somebody around here who hasn't come for any good to us," he whispered. "It may be one of the men I saw at the stores, an' then again it may be a sheriff; but whoever it is, I don't propose to give in till I'm knocked out. Will you fellers stand by me? It's a case of going to jail if we're caught now, an' there's a chance of givin' all hands the slip."

Bill hesitated, and then replied, with an effort:

"I s'pose we will have to do as you say; but I aint sure we hadn't better give right up, an' settle the whole matter."

"I like a coward!" Tom said, scornfully. "You stole a yacht, an' asked me to help run her for you. Now that you've got into a bit of trouble, you want to show the white feather. I tell you what it is, you sneak, I shall say I didn't know but that you owned this craft, an' then get the officers to let me turn State's evidence, if any is needed."

"Now what's the matter?" Bill asked, sulkily.

"We aint goin' against you, but are willin' to do whatever you say."

"If you will, an' try to muster up a little nerve, I'll pull you through the scrape as slick as a whistle. Now stretch yourselves out on this locker, an' act as if you was asleep."

This part the amateur pirates could play fairly well, providing no one saw them trembling with fear, and Tom crouched close by the companion-way stairs, after gently unlocking the door which he had fastened on first coming aboard.

The engineer was not mistaken when he believed some one was skulking near the yacht at the time of his return from the town, but he never suspected it might be one of the boys from whom the "Gem" had been stolen.

Roy and Ned had trudged manfully along the tow-path after seeing the little steamer's lights disappear in the darkness, and arrived at Comstock a few moments before Tom finished buying a stock of provisions.

They had recognized the "Gem" despite the gloom, and Roy went ahead to reconnoitre,

leaving Ned crouching behind a pile of lumber.

He did not return until the engineer arrived, and then he whispered:

"The fellow Bill and Sam have got with them isn't very much older than I; but I'm afraid we should get the worst of it if we tried to take forcible possession."

"Do you intend to give up attempting to get her after we have come so far?"

"Not a bit of it! I don't want to fail, though, and, therefore, we must wait till they are asleep. Then we'll make a break for the cabin."

"Why not sneak on deck and lock them in—that is, if all three are there? We could keep them prisoners until the townspeople came to help us."

"I'm afraid it wouldn't be much trouble for them to break through the hatch—the timbers are not very stout. I'm positive Bill and Sam will give in quickly, after they see we have the advantage, and the two of us should be more than a match for the other fellow."

"Fix matters to suit yourself, and I shall stand by your side all the time; but don't make the mistake of waiting too long."

"Come nearer, so we shall be ready," and Roy moved cautiously toward the little craft."

CHAPTER VIII

A MISCALCULATION

WHEN Roy and Ned were on the embankment, hidden by the shadow of the yacht's hull, they could have heard a conversation held in an ordinary tone by those in the cabin.

Nothing save the soft ripple of the waters as they were stirred by the night wind broke the silence, and Roy pressed his brother's arm significantly, as if to call his attention to the fact that those whom they had pursued so far were already plunged in the unconsciousness of slumber.

Had the pursuers not been so excited they would have realized that it was hardly possible the occupants of the cabin had fallen asleep so soon after the arrival of Tom Tracey, and thus much pain and annoyance would have been spared them.

Unfortunately, however, their anxiety to re-

cover possession of the little craft prevented the exercise of such caution as prudence would have dictated, and they accepted the almost ominous silence as proof that the time had come when the amateur pirates would be most readily overpowered.

Roy removed his shoes, and motioned his brother to do the same.

Then slowly and cautiously he clambered on board the "Gem," taking heed lest the weight of his body should cause the yacht to careen sufficiently to awaken the supposed sleepers, and led the way to the after cabin entrance.

Ned followed his every movement, and when his brother's hand was on the companion-way hatch, he stood close behind him.

The passage was so narrow that it would not be possible to descend side by side.

Some slight noise was necessarily made in effecting an entrance; but this apparently did not disturb the occupants of the cabin.

When the hatchway creaked as it was pushed open, Roy paused and listened; but not a sound

BEFORE THEY COULD REALIZE WHAT HAD HAPPENED, THEY WERE LYING ON THE FLOOR
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could be heard. Had the pirates been wrapped in profound slumber, their heavy breathing would have been distinguished at this moment; but Roy failed to realize such a fact.

Turning his head slightly to assure himself his brother was prepared for the venture, he softly descended the narrow steps.

The darkness was profound, and the newcomers realized that the curtains of the windows must have been drawn, otherwise it should have been possible to dimly distinguish objects in the apartment.

Roy advanced four or five paces, until he believed he stood nearly in the centre of the cabin, and as he listened for the breathing of the supposed sleepers, in order to learn exactly where they were, there was a sudden rush; he felt the weight of a heavy body hurled upon him, and, unprepared as he was at the moment for resistance, he was thrown headlong.

Then came the sound of voices, and almost before the owners of the "Gem" could realize what had happened, they were lying on the

floor with several turns of rope around their bodies, in such manner as to confine their arms securely, while Tom Tracey was lighting the cabin lamp.

"Now, you fellers can see how easy it is to do a thing when you put your mind to it," the engineer said, in a quiet tone to his companions, who, because of his triumph, had shaken off the fears which assailed them when Tracey first brought the unwelcome intelligence from the village.

Neither Roy nor Ned spoke. Both realized that the amateur pirates had set a trap into which they fell from lack of prudence. The disappointment was so great as to overpower all sense of personal discomfort and pain.

"Did you fellers count on gettin' the best of us?" Bill Dean asked, jeeringly, as he bent over Roy.

The latter made no reply.

"Perhaps you're willin', now, to let Sam an' me come in as partners?"

"Here, quit that kind of talk!" Tom Tracey

said, sharply. "It's too late for anything of the kind, unless I have a share. You fellers can't sneak out of the scrape in any such fashion, an' leave me to bear the brunt of what's happened."

"You needn't fear they will have an opportunity," Roy said, bitterly. "If we wouldn't take them in as partners before they stole the yacht, you can be very certain we sha'n't do it now."

"No; I don't reckon you will, because you haven't the chance," the engineer cried, with a sneer. "I've got the upper hand now, an' intend to hold my advantage."

"But you won't have it long," and Ned tried in vain to raise himself from the floor. "There's bound to be an end of this some time, and the longer it lasts, the worse it will be for you fellows."

"I guess we can hold out a spell, an' jest now it's you that's gettin' the worst of it," Tom Tracey said, as he busied himself with a snarl of rope which had been found in one of the lockers.

Roy looked meaningly toward his brother, as

if to say it was worse than useless to hold any parley with the thieves, and, understanding the glance, Ned remained silent.

To have seen Bill and Sam now, in the moment of their triumph, one would have found it difficult to believe they had betrayed so much fear only a short time previous. Tom Tracey had proven himself to be an able leader, and his companions felt yet more assurance of ultimate safety because of this first success than would have been possible under almost any other circumstances.

They were not satisfied, however, with calmly contemplating the prisoners to whom they had worked so much injury; but seemed to think it necessary to gloat over them in their time of trouble.

"You fellers believe you're mighty smart, don't you?" Bill began; "but you'll soon find out how much you amount to, if you come foolin' 'round us. I guess by the time you've walked back to Whitehall, you won't think you've got so big a claim on this yacht, eh?"

"Here, don't spend your time makin' foolish talk," Tom Tracey said, as he held up several pieces of rope. "See if you an' Sam have got sense enough to tie these fellers so they can't get away. Make sure of their feet, as well as their hands."

"But if we do that, we shall have to carry them ashore. Why not finish the job after they're on the bank?"

"Because I don't allow they will land."

"Goin' to drop them overboard, eh?"

"Now, don't make a fool of yourself."

"But what do you count on doin' with them?" Sam asked, impatiently. "They can't stay here, of course."

"Why not? Do you s'pose I'm fool enough to set them ashore where they can start the people in pursuit of us? We should stand a good chance of gettin' through the lock, shouldn't we, with a crowd at our heels?"

"Are you goin' to take them along?" and now Sam looked displeased as well as surprised.

"We're bound to keep them out of the way

till we're in the river, an' then there'll be time enough to decide what's to be done."

The captives now showed more signs of fear than at any time since they were overpowered. Both knew how easy it would be for the amateur pirates to set them ashore at a point from which they would find it difficult to reach home again, except after a long time had elapsed, and the possibility of regaining possession of their yacht seemed more remote than when they had first lost sight of her.

Even Bill and Sam looked disturbed at thus learning their leader's intention. Both had been willing to steal the yacht, because at the time they did not fully realize the magnitude of the crime; but to take her lawful owners prisoners, and carry them away, was more desperate an undertaking than they were willing to engage in.

"See here," Bill said, in what he intended should be an authoritative tone, "it won't do to lug these fellers too far away from home, you know."

"Oh! it won't, eh?" Tom replied, as he began

methodically to fetter Roy's limbs in such a manner that it would be almost impossible for the prisoner to move. "It strikes me you haven't got much to say about this thing. You stole the yacht, I'll admit; but how long would you have kept her if I hadn't taken hold? You got me into the scrape, an' I intend to get out of it the best way I can. So, my brave pirate, I don't allow you have any right to boss this job."

"But look here," Bill persisted, "luggin' these fellers off where they can't get home again, aint helpin' us out of the scrape by a jugful. It's only makin' matters worse."

"You think that 'cause you don't know," the leader said, carelessly. "They shall be left where it will be possible for them to get home after a while, so there's no need of worryin' about it."

"But, why not set them ashore here, or just the other side of the lock?"

"Because in less than twenty-four hours we should be in jail, that's the reason, an' I don't

care to go there when there's a chance of keepin' out of it."

Then, Roy having been bound securely, Tom turned his attention to Ned, and the latter was soon in the same helpless condition as his brother.

This did not complete the engineer's work, however. Taking the flags from the locker, he formed them into two hard rolls, which he deftly adjusted in the mouths of his prisoners, despite their struggles.

"What's that for?" Bill asked, in surprise.

"To keep them from makin' a row when we go through the lock."

"I can't see as they're in condition to do very much, even if their mouths aint plugged up."

"That's another case where your ignorance shows prominently. Wait a while, an' you'll understand the whole matter better than if I spent two or three hours explainin' it. We'll get under way now, an' you must watch the engine, while I stand at the helm, for I am

goin' to see if it isn't possible, for a feller who knows his business, to keep her in the channel even if it is dark."

"I thought you didn't want the folks in the town to know where the yacht was?"

"Neither do I."

"Then how will you get through the bridge, unless you whistle for the draw-tender?"

"Is there a bridge here?" Tom asked, in dismay.

"Of course. You couldn't have gone very far through the town without seeing it."

"I never thought to look," Tom muttered, and then, after a moment's reflection, he added, "I'll have to take the chances anyhow. You fellers stay on deck, an' keep the cabin locked, so no one can see what we've got in it. I'll be back in ten minutes."

"Where you goin'?"

"To find that draw-tender. It won't do to sound the whistle for him, or we should have the whole village down on us," and Tom motioned his companions to ascend the stair-

case, after which he extinguished the lamp, and went on deck, carefully locking the hatch behind him.

From that time until half an hour had elapsed the prisoners heard nothing of their captors, save now and then the sound of footsteps overhead, telling that Bill and Sam were patrolling the deck.

Tom did not wait to make any further explanations to his companions. Cautioning them to keep a careful watch, he departed in the direction of the town hurriedly, and the amateur pirates stood near the after companionway for several moments in silence.

Then Sam said, in a tone of dismay:

"I tell you what it is, Bill, we're gettin' further an' further into the mud the longer we follow that Tom Tracey."

"I know it, Sam," Bill wailed; "but how are we goin' to help ourselves. I don't want to go back to Whitehall an' be put in jail, an' neither do you."

"You bet I don't."

"Then we've got to stick by him. I didn't count we was really stealin' the yacht when we started in, but thought if I told Roy and Ned we was only keepin' her till they made a trade, it would straighten things out. They began to treat us as thieves, so that settled it, an' now if we're ever caught, after luggin' them off in this way, I reckon things will go tough with us."

"Do you s'pose we'll be hung?"

"Tom Tracey calls us pirates, an' I know they do hang pirates. You see, that's why we've got to stay with him, Sam. There don't seem to be any other way out of it, an' he may help us get clear."

"But it's bound to be jest as bad whenever we do get back."

"Look here, Sam, what's the use of bringin' up all the tough things you can think of jest now? Don't you s'pose I know how hard it's goin' to be never to see home again, for that's about the way we're fixed," and Bill's voice trembled as if the tears were very near his eyelids.

During the next five minutes neither of the culprits spoke, and then Sam once more broke the silence, saying, with what was very like a sob:

"This is a pretty nice kind of a lark we've started on, Bill."

"You're right; we're havin' heaps of fun out of it, aint we?"

"I wish some one had broke my leg before I'd ever gone into it, an' if Tom Tracey'd drownded himself a week ago we would be better off this minute."

"Well, he didn't, an' it looks a good deal as if he was our boss for certain. We've got to dance to his fiddlin', whether we like it or not."

The amateur pirates could gain very little consolation from such a conversation as this, and after two or three feeble attempts to find something bright amid the gloom which encompassed them, Sam abandoned the effort.

When the engineer returned he found his unhappy crew pacing to and fro on the deck in silence, each so occupied with his own disagree-

able thoughts as to have no curiosity regarding the success or failure of his efforts.

"Now, move around lively, boys, an' we'll soon be out of this," he said, in a half-whisper. "Have you heard anything from them fellers in the cabin?"

"It aint likely we have, for they can't so much as grunt," Bill replied, grimly.

"That's jest the condition we want them in till we're in the Hudson. Help me get steam on, an' we'll sneak past this town in a precious little while. I saw the draw-tender, an' had to give up two dollars before I could persuade him to let us through quietly. The bridge will be open when we get there, an' there's no time to be lost."

"You had to give him two dollars!" Sam exclaimed. "What was that for?"

"He has a pretty good idea who we are, an' it was a case of payin' that much money, or stayin' here to be caught."

There was no necessity of further explanations, and Tom went into the engine-room without delay.

Five minutes later the little craft was under way with Tom at the helm, and, favored by the gloom, she passed the village without the knowledge of any of the citizens, save the draw-tender.

Bill came forward where he could speak with the helmsman, as soon as the lights of the town were left behind, and asked:

"Are you goin' to run straight on to the next lock?"

"Yes."

"How do you count on gettin' through?"

"I've got a plan that I believe will work. It is the only one I can think of, so we're bound to try it, unless we're willin' to give ourselves up. You'd better stay in the engine-room till I call you, in case anything should happen to go wrong."

"But if it did, I wouldn't know what to do."

"I s'pose you could call me, couldn't you?"

"Yes," Bill muttered, and when he was where his words could not be overheard, he added, "I wish I never had called you."

The engineer remained at the wheel until the yacht was within fifty yards of the lock, and then whispered through the tube:

"Can you stop her, Bill, or must I come down?"

"I'll try it," Master Dean replied, and an instant later the screw ceased to revolve.

The "Gem" was run alongside the embankment opposite the tow-path, and there made fast.

Tom came into the engine-room where Bill and Sam were sitting in moody silence, and said, in what he intended should be a cheery tone:

"If you fellers feel like goin' to sleep, now's the chance. I'll keep awake till the time comes for tacklin' the draw-tender."

"What's the need of that? Why can't all hands turn in."

"For fear we might oversleep ourselves. Unless we are on the other side of the lock before sunrise, we never will get through with this craft."

"Are you goin' to leave Roy an' Ned in there?" Sam asked, as he motioned toward the cabin.

"Did you think I counted on settin' them ashore?"

"I knew better'n that, from what you said; but it seems too bad to make them stay trussed up as they are, all night. I've heard of folks bein' strangled to death by gags."

"I reckon there aint much danger of that. At all events, we must take the chances, for it wouldn't do to give them an opportunity to raise an alarm."

"You might ease up on the ropes a little."

"Yes, we might do that, an' run the risk of their easin' them off entirely. You'd better let things go as I've fixed 'em, Sam, unless you want to get into a worse scrape than we are now."

"That couldn't happen," Master Huntley replied, decidedly.

"You'd soon find out it could, if those fellers got away before we were through the lock. But

there's no use tryin' to beat any sense into the heads of sich chumps as you two are. Turn in now, an' get some sleep."

"I don't feel as if I should ever want any more," Sam replied, as he went on deck. "You can do as you've a mind to, an' I'll stay outside."

"If you're not goin' to sleep, we might as well have a game of cards. There's no reason why we shouldn't enjoy ourselves."

"I'm gettin' all of this kind of enjoyment I want, without any cards," and Sam put an end to the conversation by going forward.

CHAPTER IX

A HALT

ALTHOUGH Sam Huntley had thought it would be impossible for him to sleep, and went into the bow of the yacht to free himself from the companionship of the boy who had assumed the leadership of the party, he found that slumber persisted in visiting his eyelids, and, stretched out on the deck regardless of the dew which was falling, his senses were soon lulled into unconsciousness.

Bill curled himself up on one of the lockers, and closed his eyes more for the purpose of shutting off conversation with the engineer than to rest; but before he was aware of the fact, he too had journeyed into dreamland.

Tom Tracey did faithful duty as watchman. There were grave reasons why he wished to conceal his whereabouts, and in no way could

he do it as well as by the means with which the amateur pirates had provided him.

That which had led to his leaving home and camping in the vicinity of Whitehall also urged him to more extended flight, and from the moment Bill had requested him to act as engineer of the "Gem," he determined to benefit himself by the crime which his chance acquaintances had committed.

The gray light of dawn had just appeared in the eastern sky, when, without awakening his crew, he raised steam and prepared to leave the mooring-place.

"What's goin' on?" Bill asked, sleepily, awakened by the engineer's movements.

"It's time for us to make a break. We shall have pressure enough to turn the screw in three or four minutes, so you'd better shake Sam up, an' bring him below. I'll take the wheel, an' when we get to the lock you two fellers listen to what I say, so's to be able to back me up in everything."

Without waiting for a reply, Tom went into

the wheel-house. Bill awakened Sam, and led him to the engine-room, repeating hurriedly that which Tom had told him.

"I reckon now is the time he'll find he aint so smart as he thinks he is," Master Huntley said, gravely. "If he can get the yacht through, all right; but I don't believe anything of the kind will happen. This is where we're nabbed, Bill, an' we might as well make up our minds to it."

"I don't want to go to jail; but I aint so certain I sha'n't be glad to get away from Tom Tracey's bossin'."

"Can't you start her yet?" the engineer cried, from the wheel-house.

Bill made the attempt, and was successful.

The "Gem" steamed slowly toward the lock, her whistle sounding furiously, and by the time Tom was within hailing distance, a sleepy-looking man appeared from one of the buildings.

"Are you the lock-tender?" Tom shouted.

"Yes, I reckon I am."

"Have you seen a couple of boys go through here since last night?"

"What were they in?"

"On foot, of course."

"Then how should I see 'em? I've got enough to do watchin' for boats, without lookin' after boys. What craft is that?"

"The yacht 'Gem,' owned by Mr. Sampson of New York. A couple of fellers stole her day before yesterday, an' we managed to get hold of them the other side of Comstock; but they took to their heels, runnin' along the tow-path. They can't be far away, for it isn't an hour since they gave us the slip, an' I don't mean to go back without 'em if I can help it. How long will it take you to let us through?"

"Not a great many minutes, I reckon; but I was told to hold that craft, because she had been stolen."

"Of course she had; but it's all right now, for we've got her, an' the longer you keep us here the less show we shall have of catchin' the

thieves. We're comin' right back, so you can stop us then, if you choose."

The man hesitated a moment, perplexed by the authoritative tone in which Tom spoke.

Under almost any other circumstances he would have refused to open the locks, but the story was told so straight, and with such an assumption of truth, as well as an evident desire to catch the culprits, that he could not but believe it. Therefore he set about doing as he was requested, when Tom cried, entreatingly:

"Don't keep us here any longer than you can help, for I'm certain they can't be more than a couple of miles ahead, an' it would be mighty tough to have to go back without them, after comin' so near catchin' both nappin'."

The flood-gates were opened, and as the lock was being filled with water the man asked many questions concerning the robbery, all of which Tom answered in the most confidential manner. He even volunteered information regarding the way in which the yacht had been

stolen, told of her grounding in the old basin, and of the pursuit by the tow-path.

When Sam and Bill showed themselves at the engine-room door, the lock-tender's doubts as to the advisability of allowing the craft to proceed, were instantly dispelled, for he had been informed by telegraph that the theft was committed by two boys, whereas there were three on board, and it seemed only reasonable to suppose Tom's story true in every particular.

Twenty minutes later the "Gem" was on the south side of the lock, and so far beyond it that the sound of voices on board could not be heard by the sleepy employee of the canal company.

Tom cried triumphantly through the pilot-house speaking-tube:

"Well, what do you fellers think of matters now?"

"I reckon there's precious little chance of our being caught until we get good an' ready to let them nab us."

Bill felt almost happy as he made this reply, despite the thought that he was debarred from

ever going home again, and Sam was in quite as satisfactory a frame of mind.

That which had seemed impossible of accomplishment, was virtually accomplished after but little difficulty, and freedom, if not happiness, lay before them.

"You did a big thing!" Bill added, approvingly, "an' now I reckon we can go anywhere we please."

"Yes, for it aint likely the sheriff has telegraphed much further ahead, an' it strikes me the best thing will be to haul up a spell, if we can find a chance to hide the boat. The engine must be attended to, an' I feel as if I hadn't had any sleep for a week."

"Don't stop too near the lock!" Sam cried, warningly, and Tom replied:

"The nearer the better, for they won't mistrust we'd loaf around so close at hand. We may as well let up a little on them fellers in the cabin. Don't untie any of the ropes; but give 'em a chance to draw a long breath."

This was an order which Sam obeyed will-

ingly. Up to the moment when Mr. Sampson virtually presented Roy and Ned with the "Gem," he had had no enmity against either of the boys, and it was not pleasant to think they might be suffering, perhaps dying, through his instrumentality.

Leaving Bill to discuss with Tom the desirability of coming to a stop in the immediate vicinity, he ran into the after cabin, and had soon removed the gags, which were causing intense pain, from the mouths of the prisoners.

Fear induced him to work more quickly than the desire to relieve suffering would have done.

The faces of both the boys were of a deep purplish hue; their eyes seemed protruding, and there was every evidence they were being slowly, but surely strangled.

Ned gave vent to a low moan when the bunting was removed from his mouth, and Roy asked feebly for water.

"I believe we have killed them both!" Sam cried, excitedly, as he entered the engine-room, where the tin cups were kept. "One can't talk

at all, an' Roy didn't ask for anything but water."

He did not wait to say anything more; but, seizing one of the drinking vessels, hurried back, followed by Bill, who, for the time being, forgot that it was his duty to attend to the machinery.

Regardless of Tom's orders, the ropes were loosened to a certain extent in order to admit of the prisoners' sitting upright, for to Bill the danger seemed even greater than Sam had fancied, and both worked assiduously over their captives, until the leader of the amateur pirates could be heard shouting angrily from the wheel-house.

Master Dean ran on deck, and soon learned that Tom's anger arose from the fact that his orders to "slow down" had not been obeyed.

"I couldn't help it," he said, half defiantly, half apologetically. "Them fellers in the cabin are dyin', I believe, an' Sam and me has been tryin' to bring 'em to."

"I'll guarantee they'll last till I can get aft

an' look out for 'em. If you'd been where you belonged, I should have had the yacht in a dandy hidin' place. It is a sort of creek which runs into the canal, where we can hide without a chance of bein' seen. Go below, an' slow down when I give the word. I'll turn the craft around, an' we'll haul up there; then we'll see what should be done for your sick folks."

Bill obeyed quickly, for it seemed as if by so doing he could best aid the sufferers, and in a comparatively short time the "Gem" was lying twenty yards from the channel of the canal, in a narrow creek, almost entirely hidden by the foliage which overhung the banks.

She was made fast, bow and stern, and could not have been better screened from view had she been taken from the water and carried overland.

"Here's where we'll lay till the folks get tired huntin' for us," Tom said, in a tone of satisfaction, after he had moored the craft. "I reckon we've got provision enough to last a good many days, an' when we start again it'll be for a long run."

"Never mind anything of that kind now; but go in an' see Roy an' Ned," Bill said, nervously. "If one of 'em dies, we shall take a run we'll never come back from."

"Perhaps we've started on that kind of a trip already," Tom replied, with a shrug of the shoulders, as he went leisurely aft.

Thanks to Sam's exertions, there was nothing to be done when he entered the cabin.

Both the prisoners were showing evident signs of distress; but had so far recovered that there was, apparently, no longer any danger of a fatal termination to their sufferings.

"I reckon all hands in this crowd were more frightened than hurt," Tom said, carelessly. "I allow it wasn't very pleasant for 'em to have the yacht's flags stuck half-way down their throats; but if they insist on chasin' us, they must take the consequences. I thought I told you not to untie those ropes, Sam."

"What difference does it make to me what you said? When I found they was pretty nigh dead I did what I could to help 'em," Master

Huntley replied, angrily. "It was what I thought right, an' I'd do it again!"

"You don't want to take too many chances in that line, young fellow, or you'll have trouble," the engineer said, with a menacing gesture, and then, turning on his heel, he went up the companionway.

"Is there anything else I can do for you?" Sam asked, when Bill had followed his leader.

"Nothing, unless you're willing to give us something to eat. I don't suppose we are to be starved?"

"Of course you're not. If I could have had my way, you'd been left at Comstock."

"But if you hadn't had your way in the first place, we wouldn't have been obliged to go to Comstock," Ned said, bitterly.

"I know it," Sam replied, with a sigh; "but things didn't turn out as Bill an' me counted on, an' so we couldn't help ourselves. I'll get you some grub, an' do anything I can, except help you get away before the others think the right time has come."

Sam's fears that the prisoners were dying had made him softhearted, and he set about preparing as elaborate a meal as the condition of the larder would permit.

"If he hadn't taken that gag out of my mouth just as he did, I believe I should have died," Ned said, when he was alone with his brother once more.

"It was the worst experience I ever had; but I suppose we deserve it for making such fools of ourselves as to rush into the trap Tracey set for us."

"You think they were awake all the time we stood on the bank listening?"

"Of course they were, and counted on our doing just as we did. We acted like fools last night, and the result of it all will be that we shall not only lose the yacht, but find it a hard job to get home again in any reasonable length of time."

"Do you think they'll dare carry us very far away?"

"I can't see why they shouldn't do what-

ever they please, after having gone so far."

"I don't suppose there's any show of our regaining possession of the yacht?"

"Not the slightest," Roy replied, mournfully. "We may as well put that out of our minds, and think only of giving them the slip in case an opportunity offers before we get to the Hudson River."

"Then you no longer have any hope?"

"Very little. You see that gag took all the pluck out of me. We should have had sense enough to call upon some of the people in Comstock for help, when the 'Gem' was lying there. It would have been a simple matter to prevent the bridge from being opened, which would have prevented them from coming any further in this direction."

"We didn't do it, old fellow, so there's no reason why you should blame yourself, for it won't make matters any better. It don't seem possible we can be on board a great while without seeing some chance to get away, and I'd

rather think that will happen, than to give up entirely, as you appear to have done."

The entrance of Sam with the food put an end to the conversation.

"I didn't try to get you anything hot," the amateur pirate said, "'cause that would take too long, an' I allowed you was hungry. It's lucky Tom Tracey bought things at Comstock, else all of our stomachs would be empty by this time."

"I couldn't ask for anything better than this; but you'll have to help us get it into our mouths, Sam, unless you mean to untie our hands," and Roy looked wistfully toward the food.

There was good reason why the prisoners should be very hungry. They had left home before breakfast in order to feast their eyes upon the picture of the little steamer riding at her moorings, and the painful knowledge that she had been stolen prevented any desire for food. In fact, so eager were both in the subsequent pursuit that they did not think it necessary to spend time in eating, therefore thirty-six hours had elapsed since their last meal.

"Tom would kick terribly if I should unfasten the ropes any more," Sam said; "but if you don't mind, I reckon I can feed you."

"The sooner you begin the better," Ned replied grimly, and Roy opened his mouth as an intimation that he was ready for a share of the food.

Tom Tracey and Bill Dean were in the engine-room while Sam thus played the part of the Good Samaritan.

Bill had asked the leader to give him an idea of his plans for the future, and the latter, being in remarkably good spirits because of his success in passing the lock, was perfectly willing to comply with the request.

"I count on staying here quite a while. It's the best hidin' place we could find, because it's so near Whitehall that they will never think of our bein' in the vicinity. When we get ready to start again, if the search is continued longer, which I doubt, every one will suppose we are around New York. We can spend the summer between here and West Point. By

that time I reckon it'll be possible to put in anywhere."

"But what about provisions?"

"We can buy all we want."

"Don't you s'pose Mr. Barclay and the sheriff has telegraphed along the river?"

"Of course they have; but we can look out for ourselves when passin' the towns."

"Are we to hold Roy an' Ned all summer?"

"We'll wait a spell yet before talkin' much about that. It won't do to set 'em free yet a while, though I'd like precious well to have 'em out of the yacht, an' when we do let them free, it must be so far from home that gettin' back won't be easy."

"How much oil do you think there is in the tank?"

For the first time since he came on board the "Gem," Tom Tracey looked really distressed. In laying his plans he had entirely neglected the question of fuel, and it now flashed upon him that they might be near the end of the supply.

"I'd forgotten about that," he said, nervously. "It's somethin' we must attend to at once, for I'm afraid there may not be enough to carry us past Albany, an' that's a town we're bound to steer clear of."

"Wherever we go it'll be a hard job to get fuel aboard, if you don't dare run the yacht up to a wharf. A feller can't lug a barrel of kerosene oil around as he does a pound of meat."

"Come forward, an' let's find out how much we have got," Tom said as he went on deck. "There must be some place near, where we can buy a few gallons, if no more, an' I'll trust to luck for seein' us through."

This last remark had been made in what he evidently intended should be a careless tone; but Bill understood that the leader was growing decidedly uncomfortable in mind, and followed to learn the result of the investigation.

CHAPTER X

THE PROMISE

THE investigation made by the self-elected leader of the pirates was not calculated to relieve the anxiety which had come upon him when the question of fuel was mentioned.

Only a brief examination of the tank was necessary to show that the supply of oil was well-nigh exhausted, and that more must be obtained before they could leave their present halting place.

"I don't believe there's a gallon in there," he said, in a tone of dismay. "Them fellers must have made a longer run in tryin' the boat than I counted on."

"There's jest about the same as none," Bill exclaimed, when, as if not trusting the leader's judgment, he himself had sounded the tank. "It won't pay to stay here many hours."

"I'm certain it would be foolish to make a

start with that small amount of fuel, for, unless there's a town precious near, we might come to a stand-still, where every one passing on the canal would see us."

"Well how are you goin' to help yourself?" Bill asked, impatiently. "It seems to me as if we'd got to take some chances."

"But not such a foolish one as that."

"How will you get oil?"

"How far do you suppose it is to the next settlement?" Tom asked, without answering his companion's question.

"Fort Ann can't be more than a couple of miles away, an' I believe Smith's Basin isn't much more'n seven or eight miles from Comstock."

"Then I'll tell you how we'll get oil. We'll leave the yacht hauled up where she'll be out of sight, an' Sam shall stay on board to take care of the prisoners. Jest before sunset you an' I'll start in the tender for the nearest settlement, an' buy a couple of five-gallon cans."

"That won't carry us a great ways."

"It'll be a good deal better than none at all, an' we'll trust to the chance of gettin' more before that's used up."

"Why not run the yacht down?" Bill asked, thinking only of the labor involved in pulling the small boat to and fro.

"You know as well as I that we can't afford to run around the canal a great deal, an' besides, we've decided on stayin' where we are until the sheriff of Whitehall gets tired lookin' for us."

Bill made no reply.

He was not convinced that Tom's plan of remaining in hiding was the best that could be devised, and yet since he had known this young gentleman, who thought it wisest to leave Saratoga for a time, he had come to understand it would not be an easy matter to persuade him into changing an opinion once formed.

"Why not take Sam with you?" he asked, after a short pause.

"Why should I?"

"'Cause I allow I could take better care of Roy an' Ned."

"I reckon it's 'cause you want to get out of the work of rowin', and that's what I don't intend you shall do. You started this scheme, Bill Dean, an' have got to take your full share of the work."

"Aint that what I have done so far?"

"Well, up to the present time there hasn't been enough to wear out any feller, so you haven't had a chance to prove yourself. Now, don't go to turnin' rusty, for a pull from here to the next store won't be anything so very tough."

When he had put into execution his plan for stealing the "Gem," Bill's idea was to play the part of captain, leaving to Sam and the engineer the greater portion of the hard or disagreeable labor, and now that the tables were in a measure turned, it was decidedly unpleasant for him to take a subordinate's position. The little experience which he had had with Tom Tracey warned him it would not be advisable to run contrary to that young gentleman's expressed wishes, and he walked forward in an unenviable frame of mind.

Tom apparently paid no attention to Master Dean's ill humor, but at once went into the after-cabin, where Sam was still doing his best to render the condition of the prisoners less painful.

Tom explained briefly what his intentions were, and concluded by saying:

"I'm goin' into the engine-room to get some sleep. You must keep awake to look out for things. Call me about five o'clock, if I haven't turned out before then, and have some grub ready so we can make a quick start."

Sam nodded assent, and Roy and Ned exchanged glances as if believing there might be an opportunity of escape once they were left alone with Sam Huntley.

The prisoners were as comfortable as could be expected under the circumstances. Sam had slackened the ropes as much as he dared, in the face of Tom's positive orders to the contrary, until it was possible for the boys to change their position slightly, and therefore avoid the pain of remaining so long in one position.

They were lying on the floor of the cabin; but Sam had propped them up against the side of the locker in order that they might be fed, and both had preferred to remain in this last position.

Five minutes after Tom Tracey entered the engine-room the sound of his loud breathing told he had begun that portion of the day's programme which he mapped out for himself, and a few moments later Bill Dean came aft, throwing himself down on the deck near the companionway, much as if it were his purpose to keep watch over the prisoners and at the same time ascertain what might be going on in the canal.

The "Gem" was so near the main water-way that the voices of the boatmen as they passed up and down could be heard distinctly, and it seemed to the prisoners as if it would be only necessary to cry aloud for help in order to immediately find themselves surrounded by those who would be willing to render assistance.

Several times since Sam began to feed them

had Ned believed the proper course was to make their whereabouts known to the passers-by, and when they were left comparatively alone for a few moments, he whispered to his brother:

"S'posen we yell for help as loud as we know how, when the next boat passes?"

"I have been thinking of that, and don't believe it would pay," Roy replied, in the same cautious tone. "We wouldn't have a chance to sing out more than twice before Tom Tracey would have the gags in our mouths again, and there's little hope the canalers would stop their boats in order to learn the meaning of our cries. We shouldn't effect anything, and only succeed in making matters worse, so far as our personal comfort is concerned."

"But we're bound to do something. I don't intend to let these pirates act exactly as they please, if it can be helped."

"Neither do I; but it will be foolish to make any row, when the chances are so much against us. Matters may turn in our favor, when Bill and the engineer start out for oil."

Bill Dean had lain down at the extreme after portion of the yacht in order that he might be as far from the boy who had usurped the leadership of the party, as possible, and there it was his intention to give himself up entirely to thoughts of the wrongs which he was suffering at the hands of Tom Tracey. That he had committed a crime which debarred him from returning home, unless he was willing to submit to such punishment as the law might inflict, was no longer prominent in his mind. That which disturbed him most was the fact that Tom Tracey had deposed him from his office as captain, and he was bending all his feeble energies to the task of devising a means of changing the position of affairs more in accordance with his own desires.

The gentle murmur of the wind among the leaves, the ripple of the water against the stern of the yacht, and the hum of voices in the distance, served to soothe him to such an extent, however, that he was soon wrapped in as profound slumber as was the boy who had usurped

his rights, and Sam Huntley was the only pirate who retained sufficient consciousness to have a realization of the duties to be performed.

To Roy and Ned the moments of this day passed slowly and wearily.

More than once the latter was on the point of attempting to enter into conversation with Sam Huntley; but on each occasion Roy checked him with a glance, and finally said, when there was no danger his words could be overheard:

"There will be plenty of chance for us to talk to Sam while the others are away. Don't say anything to him now, for it wouldn't do any good, and Tom Tracey might be put on his guard."

"Do you think there is any possible show we could persuade him to help us?"

"Almost anything is possible; but whether it is probable or not, remains another matter. I believe Sam is sorry he had anything to do with stealing the yacht, and we may be able to persuade him to act as we wish."

This was sufficient for Ned. He would have been willing to do almost anything, providing an opportunity for escape could be found, and during the remainder of the day he hardly glanced toward the apparently repentant pirate.

Sam prepared the dinner for the prisoners as well as himself, and was careful not to disturb Tom and Bill until late in the afternoon, when he aroused the former by saying:

"I reckon it's pretty nigh sunset, an' you don't want to sleep much longer, accordin' to what you said this mornin'."

"That's all right," Tom replied, in a friendly tone, as he leaped to his feet. "I've scooped in jest about as much sleep as I needed, an' now can attend to business in proper shape. Anything ready for us to eat?"

"I didn't try to build a fire, 'cause I was afraid of wakin' you, an' then again I'm not certain as I know how to manage that oil stove. There's plenty of cold grub, though."

"I reckon we can get along with that. Stir Bill up a bit."

Sam roused his partner, and the latter grumbled not a little because his nap was thus concluded, before he decided to join Tom in an attack on the provisions.

"Do you still think I must go with you?" he asked, while they were eating.

"Of course I do. Have you got an idea I ought to pull to the settlement alone?"

"I don'see why Sam can't go jest as well as me."

"There's more reasons for his stayin' here now, than there was this mornin'. You've been sleepin' six or eight hours, an' he hasn't had a chance yet, nor won't till we get back."

"Well, what difference does that make?" Bill growled.

"I should say it would make considerable. You've been restin', an' he standin' watch."

"I reckon it won't hurt him to pull that little tender a while."

"Perhaps not; but I'm certain it won't have any fatal result on you, an' you're the one that's goin' with me, so don't let's have any more talk about it."

This time Tom spoke so peremptorily that Bill did not venture to reply. But for the fact that he was considerably afraid of this boy who had assumed the captaincy of the party, he would positively have refused to leave the yacht. As matters were, however, he did not think it advisable to do more grumbling. Therefore, when the tender was made ready, he got into her, looking thoroughly cross and dissatisfied, but making no further protest.

"How long shall you be gone?" Sam asked, as Tom waited until the sounds of voices on the canal had died away in the distance, before pushing the little craft out into the open water.

"I can't say exactly; but it shouldn't take us more than a couple of hours, however far we may have to pull; but don't worry if we're not back till late in the evening. There's no chance of anybody findin' you here, unless you make a noise, an' attract attention. That reminds me; I aint certain it wouldn't be best to gag those fellers again. If they should get it into their

heads to raise a row when a boat was goin' past, we might lose the yacht."

"I wouldn't do anything like that," Sam said, entreatingly. "We come pretty near killin' them before, an' I don' like the idea of takin' such chances."

"We'd better do even more, than be caught ourselves," Tom muttered, as if trying to decide which was the best plan to pursue.

"If they agree not to make a noise, I am pretty certain they won't," Sam suggested.

"Do you s'pose they'd stick to what they promised?" Tom asked, turning toward Bill.

"Yes," the latter growled, sulkily. "If Roy Barclay says he'll do a thing, you can count on it?"

Tom leaped on board the yacht again, and looking in the cabin, said sharply:

"See here, I've got to go down the canal a bit, an' believe it would be best to gag you fellers, so's to make certain you won't give an alarm. Sam don't want anything of the kind done, and Bill says he'll believe what you say.

Promise not to make a noise while I'm gone, an' you shall stay as you are. If you don't agree to that, we'll get the flags ready again."

Ned was about to make some angry reply; but Roy checked him with a look.

The latter understood that nothing could be gained by refusing to make the required promise. They were helpless, and there was no question but that Tom could and would do as he threatened, therefore, compliance with his demand was the wisest course.

All this passed through Roy's mind like a flash, and he replied, after the briefest hesitation:

"It seems pretty tough to agree not to do anything toward getting out of this scrape; but at the same time I don't see how it can be helped. We'll keep quiet, because we've got to; but don't think, Tracey, that you are going to succeed in getting away with this steamer. Word has been sent all along the canal, and you can't help being caught between here and Albany."

"If I had had the pleasure of your acquaintance before we left Comstock, you would have said we couldn't have gotten through the lock there; but we did, an' are going to keep on, without much trouble, till we get into the river."

"That's what you think; but it may turn out entirely different. What good can it do you to hold the boat two or three days longer? Give her up to us now, an' we'll agree to go back at once, without attempting to make any trouble for you. It's a serious matter to have stolen this yacht; but a good deal more so to keep us here prisoners; the law won't deal gently with you when you are arrested."

"See here," Tom said, sharply, as if unwilling his companions should hear Roy's argument. "I didn't agree to take advice from you, an' things will be pleasanter all around, I reckon, if you give up trying to do much talkin'. I don't intend we shall be caught, an' what's more, I'm not such a chump as to surrender the advantage we've got. You promise to be quiet while Bill an' I are away?"

"Yes; because we can't help ourselves."

"It don't make any difference why; all I want is to be sure of your not tryin' to attract attention."

Again Ned would have made an intemperate reply; but his brother prevented him by saying, quickly:

"We'll keep the promise I've made till to-morrow morning, and I'll even go so far as to say that we won't attempt to leave the craft, if you'll take these ropes away."

"Well, you must think I am soft, if I'd do that! I'll trust to your word so far as givin' an alarm is concerned; but wouldn't like to tempt you too much. I don't s'pose it is comfortable stayin' in one position so long; but you'll be set ashore when we get into the river. Now, then," he added, turning toward Sam, "keep your eye peeled; see to it they don't get free from the ropes, an' be careful not to show a light till we get back."

Then, hearing no sound from the direction of the canal, Tom jumped into the tender, and

pulled her slowly toward the main water-way, disappearing an instant later as the boat was forced through the overhanging foliage at the mouth of the hiding-place.

"Now is the time to learn what you can do with Sam," Ned whispered. "I believe we can persuade him into helping us; but you made a mistake in agreeing to what you did, though. Now we are bound to stay here till those fellows come back."

"I don't understand how you make that out. I promised we wouldn't try to attract the attention of any one passing. There was nothing said about our going away. If I hadn't agreed the gags would be in our mouths by this time, and then how should we be able to talk to Sam."

"I never thought of that," Ned replied, with a smile. "Go ahead; I'll trust you to get us out of the scrape if it's possible, and the sooner you begin, the better."

"There's no hurry. Those fellows won't be back as soon as they expected, and it won't pay to rush matters."

"You don't know how long they'll be gone, and, besides, if we *should* succeed in persuading Sam to do as we want him to, there's no time to be lost."

"I don't have any hope we shall be able to do anything to-night, except to get matters in shape for the future. After what has been done, Sam won't agree off-hand to all we want, and we've got to work cautiously with him."

The sound of footsteps on the deck told that Master Huntley was approaching the cabin, and the prisoners ceased conversation very suddenly.

"Well," Sam said, as he came down the companionway, "I did the best I could for you fellers, by preventing Tom Tracey from gaggin' you again."

"You did for a fact, Sam," Roy replied, in a friendly tone, "and we'll remember it when the time comes for us to do you a good turn."

"I hope that won't happen this year, for the only place I know of where you would be of any use to me, is back at Whitehall, an' I don't allow we shall be there very soon."

"That's something you can't be so positive about. I am sure you can't get out of the canal with the 'Gem.'"

"Tom Tracey pulled us past Comstock without much trouble, an' I guess we'll go a spell further before the sheriff gets hold of us. But see here, don't let's talk about them things. There's a chance now for us to have something hot to eat, an' I'm goin' to get it."

"All right; we shall be ready for supper whenever you are," Roy replied, as if it was a matter of but little moment to him whether the conversation was continued or not, and Sam went into the engine-room, leaving Ned very much dissatisfied because the overtures for escape were thus delayed.

CHAPTER XI

DISAGREEABLE COMPANIONS

WHEN the tender was in the canal, and Bill saw that his companion was willing to do his full share of the work of rowing, the greater portion of his ill-nature vanished.

He had sufficient common sense to understand it could do him no good to remain at variance with the self-elected captain, and was equally well aware that matters would be much more pleasant, so far as he personally was concerned, if there was at least a semblance of friendly feeling between them.

Therefore it was that when they had settled down to the work of rowing, he said, in as cheery a tone as it was possible for him to assume:

"I reckon we sha'n't have to go more than two miles before we come to a store of some kind."

"Not unless the towns are further apart than you think."

"We must be at least half-way between Comstock and Smith's Basin, which would bring us pretty nigh Fort Ann."

"Well, we shall soon find out. With two pair of oars in a boat of this size, we ought to be movin' along at the rate of three or four miles an hour."

"I don't see how we're goin' to bring oil back, for we haven't anything to put it in."

"If we find a place where they sell it, we sha'n't have much trouble to buy a couple of cans, and that is what will have to be done anywhere, unless we take it aboard by the barrel."

"Don't you think there's danger some one may suspect who we are?"

"Not a bit of it, unless we strike a big town. Besides, I don't believe the sheriff warned every place along the canal. It doesn't stand to reason he'd go to so much expense. The chances are more than even that he simply sent word to Comstock, and when he finds we got

past that town, will telegraph to the lower locks. There's where we're goin' to have the most trouble, an' yet I reckon we shall slip by in some fashion."

"It don't look to me as if it was all goin' to be plain sailin'," Bill said, with a sigh. "I'm mighty sorry I ever started in on this thing."

"It's too late for anything of that kind now, an' I can tell you for a fact that you would have been in jail twenty-four hours ago, if I hadn't been with you to manage affairs."

"I guess you're right about that," Bill replied, frankly. "In the first place, I didn't count on really stealin' the yacht the same as we have done, but was sure Roy an' Ned would agree to what we wanted jest as soon as they found we had the upper hand."

"But you did steal her, an' if you had been caught before we got into the canal at all, matters would have been just as bad. You can't make things worse by tryin' to hold possession of her. Therefore I don't see why it is you're growin' so weak-kneed as to want to go back,

knowin' it's a case of stickin' your nose into jail."

"But I don't want to go back," Bill said, decidedly.

"Then what's made you turn so rusty?"

"Well, in the first place, it don't make me feel easy to carry Roy an' Ned away."

"But it's got to be done, if you want to keep out of the sheriff's hands."

"I s'pose it has; but you know as well as I do, that we're only makin' things worse."

"I don't see it in that light. The worst we can be arrested for is stealin' the steamer. Makin' them fellers stay aboard don't cut any figure in the matter at all. Once we're in the river, where there are plenty of chances for hidin', we'll set them ashore, and it'll be many a long day after that before they see the 'Gem' again."

Bill sighed. As in Sam's case, the scheme had become more serious than he contemplated, and the idea of not being allowed to return home again caused him decided unhappiness.

As he pulled stubbornly at the oars, he realized that but for the boy in front of him, he would not be in such a position, because when Roy and Ned refused to make the desired bargain relative to the ownership of the yacht, he and Sam would probably have abandoned her, and tried to persuade the Barclay boys it was a practical joke, rather than a deliberate crime. He failed to realize he was responsible for all that had occurred, and thought only of the fact that Tom Tracey had forced him into this unceremonious departure from home.

As a matter of course, he did not give words to that which was in his mind, but rowed on in silence until his companion, turning partly around, exclaimed:

"There's jest the place I hoped we should find."

Following Tracey's example, Bill saw on the bank of the water-way a collection of three or four buildings, one of which was evidently a shop, kept for the accommodation of travelers on the canal.

"No matter how many telegrams the sheriff sent out, I'll guarantee none of them came here," Tracey continued, in a tone of satisfaction. "We can get what we want, without fear of the truth being suspected, and, inasmuch as I have money to pay for the stuff, it'll be queer if we're not rigged out in good shape before we start again."

The boat was hurried toward the little settlement, and five minutes later the amateur pirates were looking about them in the shop, while a small knot of loungers regarded them with the liveliest evidences of curiosity.

As a matter of course, kerosene oil was to be had in abundance, but after some questioning it was learned that the proprietor had but one five-gallon can for sale.

"I can let you have a barrel, if you want it," the man said, as he faced Tom abruptly; "but it strikes me you ought to be able to get along on five gallons till you can come again."

"I allow that's what we'll have to do, if you've only got one can."

"Then you don't care for a barrel?"

"My boat isn't large enough to carry it."

"I can send it up the canal easy enough. Where are you located?"

"About four miles from here."

"Campin' out, eh?"

"Yes."

"Canvas tent?"

Tom hesitated an instant, and then replied, decidedly:

"Yes; we've got everything of that kind; but run out of oil."

"It'll take you quite a spell to use up five gallons, I should think," suggested one of the loungers, a man who looked more like a tramp than a reputable citizen.

Tom understood that it was necessary he should make some reply, or run the chance of provoking more questions, therefore he said:

"The trouble is, we don't want to pull down here any oftener than we can help. Of course we shall get along quite a spell with this; but it won't last forever."

"How many are there in the crowd?" the shop-keeper asked.

"Five."

"I reckon you use a stove to cook with?"

"Of course."

"Then five gallons will last you a couple of weeks, I should think. It strikes me you can't have much of anything else to do but to pull 'round the canal. How do you spend your time, any how?"

If the shop-keeper's manner had been offensive, Tom might with some reason have refused to answer his questions; but he assumed such an air of good-nature and friendliness that an honest boy could not refuse to satisfy his curiosity, and, while Bill was inwardly quaking lest the inhabitants of the settlement should learn the true character of the "campers-out," Tom explained that they had come on the canal for the purpose of spending a few weeks in idleness.

"I should have thought you'd tried it on the lake," the disreputable-looking man suggested.

"There's plenty goin' on there, an' you can get game as well as fishin'."

"Most likely we shall go up that way after a spell; but jest now we're satisfied where we are."

Then, hoping to put an end to the conversation, Tom purchased a small amount of provisions, and bustled around in the liveliest possible manner in getting them aboard the tender; but he did not succeed in his purpose.

The apparent tramp soon began to evince more curiosity than had the shop-keeper, and after a short time both the boys understood from what was said around them that this man, and a companion who was equally as unprepossessing, were strangers in the place.

He and his friend offered to aid the boys in taking their purchases from the shop to the boat; but Tom refused the assistance, and, greatly to his relief, both the strangers left the building before he had finished his business.

Ten minutes later the boys took their departure, Tom cautiously answering the many questions which were hurled at him even after the

boat was being pulled up the canal, and when they were beyond hailing distance, Bill said, fretfully:

"It seems to me you told them folks about everything you know."

"Well, what else could I do?"

"Hold your tongue, the same way I did."

"Yes, an' then they would have mistrusted at once there was something wrong, an' most likely tried to find out for themselves. That would have been a fine way to bring the crowd down on us! Now they think they know it all, an' there isn't anything very strange in a party of fellers campin' out here."

"Well, I think there is. If it was 'round the lake now, things would be different; but nobody ever comes on the canal, for they can't even catch fish."

"Then all the more reason why we should try to keep them quiet by givin' out some kind of a yarn."

"It would have been a good deal better, if you hadn't said anything," Bill persisted.

"That shows how much you know of such things. Leave you and Sam to yourselves for half an hour, an' we should all be in jail."

"We aint so very far from it now, accordin' to my way of thinkin'."

"We are not locked up yet, an' that's what would have happened yesterday, if it hadn't been for me."

It was evident that Tom was growing angry, and Bill thought it wisest not to prolong the conversation. Therefore he devoted all his attention to rowing.

They had proceeded about a mile in silence, and had arrived at a portion of the canal where the foliage extended down to the very edge of the tow-path, when a cry, apparently of distress, was heard.

Involuntarily both the oarsmen ceased their labors, and Bill said, nervously:

"I wonder what's goin' on in there?"

Tom listened until the cry was repeated, this time fainter than before, and Bill whispered, with every evidence of extreme agitation.

"Let's pull on. I don't like to stay here when we don't know what's happenin'."

"Don't make a fool of yourself; but find out what is the matter," and before Bill could have prevented him, even had he dared to do so, Tom pulled the boat sharply around until her bow stuck in the mud at the edge of the tow-path.

Leaping out, Tom started in the direction from which the cry had proceeded, but before he had taken a dozen steps the foliage in front of him was moved as if by some heavy body, and the disreputable looking man, whom they had seen at the settlement, appeared.

"Hello! Haven't you got back to your camp yet?" he asked, with a grin.

"What's goin' on here?" and Tom spoke sharply. "I thought I heard somebody cry for help."

"I don't reckon you did, son. My partner was tryin' to sing, that's all. Here, Abe," he cried, "come out an' show yourself! These young gentlemen can't tell the difference between music an' distress."

A SECOND MAN APPEARED IN RESPONSE TO THIS SUMMONS
(See page 181)

A second man appeared in response to this summons, and Tom began to realize that he might have been indiscreet. He turned toward the boat as if to depart, but was halted by the first speaker, who laid his hand heavily on his shoulder.

"See here, my son," the tramp said, in a tone of menace, "Abe an' me have kinder taken a notion that we'd like to go up to your camp a spell, if you don't care. We've got to stop somewhere to-night, an' it's gettin' too late to hunt 'round for lodgings."

"But we haven't got any place for you. There's no room there," Tom said, hurriedly, trying to shake off the detaining grasp.

"But we aint at all particular how we get along, an' you'll find that it'll pay to be kinder civil to us, for we can do a power of work when we're a mind to. Now you get in, an' we'll pull this boat up the canal."

"But I tell you there's no room at our camp, an' we won't have you, that's all."

"Then we shall be obliged to go whether you

want us or not," Abe said, as he calmly began to clamber into the boat. "Come on, Seth, we'll pull her up there in a jiffy, an' when these young gents see how much muscle we've got, I reckon they'll be glad we picked them up so late at night."

It was late indeed, as Tom realized to his dismay. The sun was just setting when they left the shop, and the night was now fast approaching.

Had it been earlier in the day it might have been possible for the boys to row aimlessly around the canal, pretending not to be able to find the camping-place, until the men were tired out; but, as it was, Tom realized at once the necessity of returning to the yacht as soon as possible. At the same time he understood fully how dangerous it would be to take with them these men, who evidently cared very little for the rights of others where their own desires were concerned.

Tom also understood that to attempt to prevent these men by force would be useless, and

it seemed better they should be allowed to steal the boat and all she contained, rather than discover the "Gem's" hiding-place.

"Come out here, Bill," he said, quickly. "If them fellers count on stealin' what we've got, let them do it. It won't be a great while before we can have them arrested. Come out here, an' we'll see whether we've got to take them up to camp or not."

Bill hesitated.

He sat cowering in front of the man who had been called "Abe," not daring to move, and not wishing to remain, until Seth had pushed the little craft from the bank.

"You can do jest as you have a mind to, young feller," the tramp said, with a laugh. "We aint urgin' of you to carry us along; but if you're bound to abandon your boat, why we'll take care of her. Don't think you're goin' to scare us out by any cock-an'-bull story of havin' us arrested, 'cause we haven't done anything but ask to go up to camp with you."

"Pull that boat in here!" Tom cried, sternly.

"Pull that boat into the bank, where she was."

With a hearty laugh, as if he saw something comical in the situation, the fellow turned the little craft's bow in a leisurely manner, and then, with one sweep of the oars, forced her to the bank.

"I allow the boat aint mine; but don't reckon it'll be necessary for me to pull back and forth on the canal all night to convince you I aint stealin' of her," he said.

"Now get out," and Tom spoke in the most commanding tone he could assume.

"Well, you see, young fellow, when it comes to anything like that, we shall have to discuss the matter."

"We'll discuss nothing while you remain in that craft."

"Then I'm very sorry to say, young chap, that we sha'n't have very much of an argument to-night, 'cause Abe an' me are kinder countin' on gettin' up to this 'ere camp with you. It strikes me if there wasn't something crooked about the business, you wouldn't be so feared of

gentlemen visitin' you. It appeared to me, when you was buyin' grub, that things wasn't jest as you made out, an' so Abe an' me, we thought we'd investigate matters."

"What right have you got to meddle with my affairs?" Tom cried, angrily, realizing that the tramp was forcing him into a very uncomfortable position.

"Well, none as I knows of, exceptin' a general desire to do good all 'round. You see, Abe an' me is kinder missionaries in that respect. We travel over the country, lookin' for pleasant chances to do good, an' this 'ere seems to be one of 'em."

Tom was angry, perplexed, and afraid at the same moment. He remained silent and motionless, trying to devise some means of getting rid of this importunate fellow, for he realized only too well that the two would be veritable "Old Men of the Sea," once they were in possession of his secret.

Bill remained in the same attitude as when Tom went ashore. He understood, as did his

companion, how disastrous to their plans it would be if the tramps should discover the yacht, but yet he could think of no way by which it might be prevented, and was perfectly willing Tom should resume all responsibility in the matter.

"Well?" the tramp asked, with a grin, "what seems to be delayin' you? I reckon you don't feel like havin' visitors, eh?"

"I most certainly don't an' sha'n't, if I can help myself," Tom replied, decidedly.

"Well, seeing's how you can't help yourself, s'pose you get in, an' we'll pull you up to your camp. Abe an' me aint got no very rushin' business on hand though, so if you want to loaf 'round here a few hours, don't let us hurry you."

It was necessary Tom should decide upon some course of action, and the only plan which he could think of on the spur of the moment gave little hope of success.

It was to allow the tramps to pull the boat up the canal until they should get tired of such

work, and eventually go ashore, trusting that in the gloom Bill would not be able to reveal the secret of the hiding-place, because of his inability to recognize the landmarks.

Tom had no fear the amateur pirate would voluntarily give any information to the tramps; but he understood that in Bill's present frame of mind, not comprehending his companion's course of action, he might inadvertently betray some sign that they were near the alleged camp.

"All right," he said, with an assumption of cheerfulness, which was far from natural, as he stepped slowly into the boat. "If we've got to keep you over night I s'pose we may as well make the best of a bad job. It'll take a couple of hours, rowin' the best you can, to get to the camp," and Tom looked meaningly at Bill as he spoke.

"I thought you said you was located only three or four miles up this way?"

"Well, I stretched it a bit, because I didn't care to have every one know where we was."

"Kinder queer," the man said, drily, "you should come right by Comstock without gettin' your oil there. If your camp is as far away as you want to make out it must be a good bit the other side of that town."

Tom made no reply. He knew now that his unwelcome guests were so well acquainted with this particular portion of the country that there was little hope of deceiving them, as he had for a moment hoped.

The tramps apparently paid no attention to the dismay which he displayed so plainly; but began leisurely to row the boat up the waterway, as if understanding full well the location of their place of destination.

CHAPTER XII

THE APPEAL

SAM felt decidedly relieved in mind when he was left alone in charge of the prisoners, because Tom Tracey was not there to remind him he had a master.

If he had dared to remove the ropes from Roy and Ned, trusting to their promise not to attempt escape, he would have felt comparatively happy. The fact of their being forced to remain in such an uncomfortable position, troubled him greatly, and he resolved, as a sort of reparation for the wrongs inflicted, that they should have the best supper it was possible for him to prepare.

After some time spent in study, he succeeded in mastering the intricacies of the oil stove, and gradually began to whistle as he bustled around with the cooking utensils, making as much noise as if preparing a veritable feast for at least half a dozen.

"Judging from the preparation he is making, the others will be back before you'll have an opportunity of talking with him," Ned said irritably, and Roy replied, cheerfully:

"I guess there's no fear of that. Those fellows won't do their errand for a couple of hours, and Sam hasn't got so much to cook, but that he'll be through in half that time."

Ned was not satisfied that this prediction would be verified. He was perfectly willing to get along without supper, if by so doing the time could have been spent in convincing the amateur pirate that it would be to his advantage to set them free.

"Now don't trouble your head over what you can't help," Roy whispered, cheerily. "Let him do as he wishes, and after a hearty supper he'll feel more like listening to our proposal."

Ned shook his head mournfully, as if to say that in his opinion a delay would be fatal, and the prisoners remained silent until half an hour had elapsed, when Sam's employment as cook ceased for the time being. He had not pre-

pared an elaborate meal, and for two reasons. The first because of ignorance, and the second owing to a lack of raw material.

What he did bring into the after-cabin, however, was sufficiently appetizing to be welcomed heartily by the prisoners.

Roy said with a laugh as he tried in vain to straighten himself up:

"It's too bad we can't all eat together, instead of your being obliged to feed us, Sam."

"I'd untie your hands quick enough, if it wasn't for Tom Tracey," the amateur pirate replied, promptly, "but he'd raise such a row if I did anything of the kind that you see I don't dare."

"I didn't ask you to go against his orders; but was only thinking it would be more sociable."

"I'll see that you're filled up in good shape before I attend to my own supper, an' I want you to believe you never would have suffered as much as you have, if I had had my way."

"At the same time, Sam, you must admit you

are responsible in a certain degree for our being here. If you and Bill hadn't stolen the yacht, Tom Tracey wouldn't be lording it over you as he is now."

"That's a fact," and Sam gave vent to a long-drawn sigh. "I wish we never had got into the scrape; but so long as we did do it, it's got to be carried through."

"I don't see as that follows. It's only necessary to carry it through because Tom Tracey, for reasons of his own, wants to leave this part of the country. It strikes me, Sam, you're working more for him than yourself."

"That's pretty near the same thing I told Bill yesterday. Tom Tracey must have done something crooked in Saratoga, an' when he found we'd stole the yacht, made up his mind it was a good chance for him to get clear."

"Why do you help him carry out his plan? It'll only serve to get you in worse trouble."

"I don't see how that can be. We should be put into jail if we went back to Whitehall now, an' it can't be any worse a year from this time."

"You wouldn't be arrested, unless we appeared against you. There's nothing to prevent our settling this matter right here, if you say the word. I'll guarantee that no harm shall come to you if you'll give us a chance to take the yacht back at once."

"But I can't," Sam cried, in alarm. "Tom Tracey would jest about kill me."

"I don't know how he could do that very well. S'pose you untied us now, and we started toward home. He couldn't catch us, and if he did come around making a row, we could have him arrested."

"You might if you was only in town."

"We shouldn't stop anywhere else."

"Then there's Bill," Sam suggested.

"He would be just as much the gainer as you."

"But we shouldn't dare to wait for him, if you was goin' to leave now."

Ned's heart beat high with hope, for Sam's tone was such as to cause him to believe there was a chance the appeal might not be in vain.

"Of course we should have to leave him behind; but how long would it take him to walk to Whitehall?"

"He wouldn't walk there at all, 'cause he'd think you'd have him arrested at the first chance."

"I'll tell you what we might do, Sam," Roy exclaimed, as a sudden thought occurred to him. "If you set us free now, and do all you can to help us, it won't take long to get the best of Tom Tracey. Untie my hands, and I'll agree to prevent him from doing any mischief."

It could plainly be seen that Sam did not put much faith in this assertion. To him Tom was an unusually dangerous antagonist, and probably had it been proposed that Bill also be induced to mutiny against the self-elected captain, joining his forces with the prisoners, Sam would still have had doubts as to the ultimate result.

"I don't see what you hope to gain by keeping us here," Roy said, after a brief pause, during which he understood that he had lost

ground by his last proposition. "You'll have to put us ashore presently, and then there'll be no show of your going home without the certainty of arrest. Now all that is necessary is to set us free, and we promise faithfully that neither you nor Bill shall be made to suffer for what has been done."

Sam rubbed his chin in perplexity.

Nothing would have given him greater pleasure than to have been able to start for home immediately; but his fear of Tom was so great that he did not think such a desirable change in affairs possible.

"It's the only show you'll have of making this kind of a trade," Roy said, speaking now more decidedly. "After the yacht has been knocked around between here and New York two or three months, we sha'n't be willing to smooth matters over in this fashion."

"You want me to untie them ropes, an' go back to Whitehall?" Sam said, after a moment's hesitation.

"You needn't go back with us unless you

choose. Set us free, and we'll promise that you sha'n't be arrested, that's all."

Sam remained silent as if in deep thought for several moments, and then said, abruptly, as he started to his feet, forgetting that it had been his intention to eat supper, "Let me think this thing over a spell. I'd like to do as you want, first-rate, fellers, 'cause I didn't allow we was gettin' into any such scrape, an' wish I was well out of it."

"It won't take you long to get clear of all the consequences."

Sam made no reply; but ascended the companionway stairs in a thoughtful mood, and Ned whispered to his brother:

"Do you believe he'll agree to it?"

"Yes. Perhaps he won't get around to our way of thinking to-night; but by to-morrow he'll be willing enough."

"Then we may not have as good a chance. It isn't likely Tom Tracey is going to leave the yacht an hour or two each day, and with him on board, the matter would be a good deal worse."

"Well, there's one thing about it, old fellow," Roy replied, with a nervous laugh, "we can't help ourselves. It all rests with Sam, and we're bound to abide by his decision, because of the fact that we are literally tied hand and foot. Even if we don't succeed in the attempt now, before they reach the river Tom will be acting his part of captain in such a fashion that both Bill and Sam cannot fail of wanting to part company with him."

Ned was too anxious in mind to continue this conversation, and the prisoners waited in silence until it should please the amateur pirate to come below again.

Sam remained on deck fully half an hour, and to Ned it seemed as if two hours had elapsed before he entered the cabin.

"See here, fellers! This is jest the way it stands," Sam said, abruptly, speaking as if he had absolutely decided upon his course of action. "You couldn't get the yacht away, if I was to take off them ropes this very minute."

"Why not?"

"Because there isn't oil enough to run her half an hour. That's why Tom went down the canal. Now I want to make a trade with you, for I've got enough of this pirate business; but it wouldn't be a fair thing by Bill to do anything right away. I went in with him when matters looked as if we could do about as we wanted to, an' now when it comes to the end, I mustn't go back on him, do you see?"

"No, I don't see," Roy replied quickly, "because you will be doing him as much of a favor as you will yourself."

"But he wouldn't know it, and the chances are he'd keep right on with that Tom Tracey, while I was home takin' things easy."

"Perhaps we could find some way to let him know what you have done before we reached Whitehall."

"There's only a chance that could happen, an' then again there aint any show of our getting back as far as Comstock. Of course Tom Tracey would know that you'd gone up the canal, if he should come an' find the yacht

missin', an' would keep right on after us. We'd get about a mile up here, then the fuel would give out, an' I'd be caught."

"So you think you had better not try to help yourself by helping us?" Ned asked, eagerly.

"No, I don't think anything of the kind. As I said before, I want to get out of the scrape the worst way; but Bill must be with me. Now you fellers stay here quiet till to-morrow. I'll get a chance to talk with Bill to-night or to-morrow mornin'. I'm almost certain he'll agree to the trade, an' the first show after that, we can give Tom Tracey the slip."

"Why not do it now and make sure?" Ned asked. "Perhaps it'll be too late to-morrow morning. You are the one who will gain the most by it. We shall only lose the boat, and you're bound to fetch up some day in jail."

"I know it," Sam replied, with a sigh. "I know it; but, fellers, I can't help myself. You couldn't get the 'Gem' off now, 'cause there isn't any oil, an' I'll have to take the chances on doin' it to-morrow or the next day. The best I

can say is that I'll get Bill to do as I want him, an' then we'll go ahead."

Ned continued for several moments in the effort to bring about a different conclusion in Sam's mind; but Roy had nothing more to say. He understood that the amateur pirate would not do other than he had said—that he believed by acting alone he would be wronging his friend, and was not willing to take advantage of a pardon in which Bill might not be able to share.

Under other circumstances the boys would have applauded this trait in the amateur pirate; but just now they failed to see anything manly in the part he had taken.

"It's no use to talk any more," Roy finally said, interrupting his brother's passionate appeals. "Sam has agreed to try to help us out when Bill is here, and we must be contented with that."

"Yes, I'll do all I can," Sam said, in a positive tone, "an' there aint much question but that with Bill an' I workin' for the same thing,

it can be fixed. It seems to me them fellers ought to have been home before this. It's gettin' pretty dark, an' won't be such an easy matter to find the yacht in the night."

Then Sam went on deck, and Roy and Ned discussed this slight change in the position of affairs in whispers.

The latter was greatly disappointed because they had not fully succeeded, while Roy tried to persuade him their condition had improved very much during the interview.

An hour passed, and those who went in search of oil had not returned.

Sam began to grow decidedly uneasy, while Roy and Ned believed they had good cause for hoping the amateur pirates had been arrested.

"If the sheriff telegraphed ahead to all the places on the canal, as he agreed to, it isn't improbable that they have been arrested," Roy said to his brother.

"But I suppose Sam would keep us here a week for fear Tom might raise a row with him, if he took these ropes off."

"We ought to feel kindly disposed toward Sam Huntley, even though he did steal the yacht, for there is no question now but that he is willing to help us, and will do all he can to persuade Bill to his way of thinking."

"So many things stand in the way of our getting clear that I begin to question whether we shall ever receive help from those on board this steamer."

"And if we don't, our chances of getting possession of her again are very slim."

Another hour passed, and yet the absent ones did not return.

"Something must have happened to them," Sam said, in a tone of dismay, as he entered the cabin. "It's past nine o'clock, an' they ought to have been back an hour ago, because there wouldn't be any need of rowin' more than three or four miles, I shouldn't think."

"Most likely they have been arrested," Ned suggested.

Sam looked startled a moment, and then relieved.

"No, it couldn't be anything like that," he said, decidedly, "for Tom Tracey would have sent the sheriff up here after me, so as to get his own neck out of the scrape. That's the kind of a feller he is. Now—"

At that instant the sound of voices from the direction of the canal caused Sam to cease speaking very suddenly, and he went to the companionway, peering out into the gloom of the night.

"They're comin'," he said an instant later, in a tone of relief, and then added, quickly, "I'll be jiggered if there aint somebody with 'em! They must have run afoul of the sheriff after all, an' are comin' here for me."

"Then you have lost your chance of getting clear by not doing as we wanted you to," Ned said, grimly.

"I couldn't go back on Bill," Sam muttered, half to himself, "an' now I suppose I'll have to take whatever dose the sheriff is a mind to give me."

"So this is what you call a camp, eh?" the

occupants of the cabin heard a coarse voice exclaim. "Well, young gents, it's a mighty lucky thing for Abe an' me that we run afoul of you jest as we did, for there's nothin' us two so set our hearts on as knockin' 'round this 'ere canal in a craft like that."

"It aint certain you'll do any knockin' 'round with us," they heard Tom reply, in a sulky tone. "We've got no room for visitors."

"But I allow you'll make some when it's Abe an' me what wants to jine your crew."

"That's not the sheriff," Sam said, somewhat relieved, and Roy added, sorrowfully, guessing at once the true situation of affairs:

"I allow it isn't; but if they've picked up strangers who insist upon cruising with them, we shall stand a poor show of giving Tom Tracey the slip."

"Why?" Ned asked quickly.

"Because if he has brought any one here, and is obliged to explain the true state of affairs, as he must be when we're found in this condition, there will be jest so many more to watch us."

"'Gem' ahoy!" Tom shouted from the boat.

Sam ran on deck.

"All right on board here?" Tom asked.

"There's nothin' gone wrong with us. What have you got? Some visitors?"

"A couple of loafers insisted on comin' back with us, an' count on staying', I reckon; but they'll soon find out their mistake," Tom replied as the boat was pulled alongside the yacht, and one of the men referred to cried, as he leaped on board:

"I don't allow we made any mistake, young feller; but you'll find you have if you don't keep a pretty civil tongue in your head. It doesn't take a bright man very long to understand what has happened, when he sees boys with a craft like this, an' I reckon you'll be willin' to treat us pretty decently for the sake of keepin' our mouths shut."

CHAPTER XIII

A QUESTION OF AUTHORITY

THE prisoners heard the sound of the boat's crew coming on deck, and then there was considerable tramping to and fro, causing both the boys to feel decidedly uneasy in mind.

"I wonder what induced Tom Tracey to bring anybody back with him," Ned whispered. "Of course he'll have to admit he's stolen the yacht."

"I don't think there is any necessity of his doing that, after what one of those fellows said. He has got visitors that I'm afraid he won't get rid of very soon."

"What do you mean?"

Before Roy could reply Sam came softly into the cabin, tip-toeing his way to the prisoners, and crouching by their side, whispered:

"Bill says these are a couple of tramps that jest about the same as took possession of the boat

down on the canal, an' he allows they're goin' to make trouble for all hands."

"*We* can't have it any worse than we're getting it now," Roy said, in a tone which was very like that of satisfaction, and then added, as he realized what all this might mean to them, "I shouldn't be sorry to see Tom Tracey get a pretty good dose, if it wasn't for the fact that there seems to be precious little chance of you and Bill doing anything to help us."

"Why can't we now jest as well as before, an' perhaps a little better?"

"Because these visitors have shown that the question of stealing a yacht wouldn't trouble them very greatly, and after finding a craft somebody else has been kind enough to steal for them, they'll be likely to hold possession as long as possible. Now, instead of having only Tom Tracey to outwit, you have got two others, probably equally as bad, if not worse."

"Where's the steward of this steamer?" one of the strangers shouted, and Tom Tracey's voice was instantly heard summoning Sam.

"I'll be back as soon as I can, if Bill tells me anything more," he whispered, and then ran on deck.

The prisoners in the cabin could readily hear anything which might be said above them, and a moment later they got a fair idea of what the amateur pirates might expect while the newcomers were pleased to continue with them as visitors.

"Why aint you tendin' to your business?" one of the men asked, with an oath, as Sam ran forward.

"Because I aint got any," Sam replied. "I'm no more of a steward than any of the other fellers. I don't even know how to make coffee."

"Don't give me any of your back talk," the man who had been called "Seth," replied as he struck Sam a resounding blow on the side of the head which sent him reeling against the pilot-house. "Your skipper, here, called you the steward, an' that's what you will be, while I'm aboard, young feller, do you understand? Now get out the best you've got to eat, an' see

that it's put up as a gentleman should have it."

"If they keep on in this way, it won't be many hours before even Tom himself will be sorry he ever found a chance to run away with a yacht," Ned whispered, in a tone of satisfaction.

Tom had called Bill to assist him in taking on board the oil and other stores which he had purchased, and the new-comers followed Sam into the engine-room, where each made a personal examination of the contents of the larder.

Seth directed what should be prepared for their evening meal, insisting on Sam's doing the best he could over the oil stove, and spent fully three-quarters of an hour in making ready and eating the supper, during all of which time Bill and Tom remained forward.

The meal having been eaten, the two tramps filled and lighted their pipes, and began a survey of the yacht, forcing Sam to follow them.

Their first visit was to the bow, where Tom and Bill were seated on the rail.

"What are you two hatchin' now?" Seth cried, as if in a passion, seizing the self-elected captain by the coat collar, and pulling him down on the deck in a very painful fashion. "Think you can get rid of us, eh? Well, let me tell you, young feller, that we're here to stay. A cross-eyed man could see how you happened to have this craft, an' we've got as much right here as anybody. Now look cheerful, or it'll be worse for you."

Tom struggled to release himself; but the tramp only held him the tighter, and, half-strangled, he began to kick furiously, landing two or three blows on the shins of his captor.

"Say, Abe," the man said, calmly, as if speaking of some unimportant duty, "I reckon we may as well give this bantam a dose now, so as to kinder introduce ourselves, eh?"

"There's no need of wastin' any time."

"That's my idea," and seizing the end of the heaving line, Seth began methodically to flog Master Tracey as he had probably never been flogged before.

During at least five minutes he worked incessantly and energetically, and then, still retaining his hold of the boy's collar, said:

"I started in with you, 'cause you flash up as if you was the captain; but the rest of your crew will get it jest about the same, if they don't mind their eyes. Now come along here and let's see what kind of a craft you've got."

Very sore both as to body and mind, Master Tracey was dragged aft, and there was no longer sufficient spirit left in him to bluster.

He had previously determined, after learning that it would be impossible to prevent the tramps from accompanying him to the yacht that they should not be permitted to see the prisoners; but the flogging which Seth had administered restrained him now from making any protest.

Abe entered the cabin first, and stumbled over Roy, who, as a matter of course, was unable to get out of his way, falling headlong.

"Now, what's goin' on?" Seth cried, shaking Tom much as a cat does a mouse, and the prostrate tramp shouted:

"Strike a match, old man. There's something alive down here."

"Of course there is," Roy replied. "These fellows stole our yacht from Whitehall, and when we tried to regain possession, got the best of us. I'm stretched out here on the cabin floor, tied hand and foot."

Seth had begun to light the match; but when Roy had thus briefly explained the position of affairs he laughed so heartily that the tiny bit of burning wood fell from his hands.

"Well, this is a joke that beats anything I ever struck in my life," he said, as soon as it was possible for him to speak, and Abe had scrambled to his feet. "Where's that steward?"

"Here I am, sir," Sam replied from the deck, answering very promptly lest he should be served as had Master Tracey.

"Is there any lamp down here that you can light, so we can see where we are?"

"There's one in the cabin, an' two or three lanterns in the engine-room."

"Well, light this one here, an' be quick about it."

Sam obeyed with alacrity, and when the prisoners were thus disclosed to view, Seth and Abe gave way to another burst of merriment, but the former was careful not to lose his grasp of Tom's collar.

"I'd kind of like to hear how the thing was done, young feller," Tom's captor said, as he stretched himself out on the cushioned locker, forcing Master Tracey to kneel by his side. "We've got plenty of time, I reckon. This is a good snug spot, where I allow there aint any likelihood of our bein' interrupted, an' you may as well give us the story."

Roy obeyed willingly. Not that he fancied the tramps would do anything toward assisting him to regain possession of the "Gem," but with the idea that they might be less willing to permit the yacht to sail past any of the towns at which information could have been received.

"I reckon this is the captain of the crowd," Seth said, as he gave Tom another shake which caused his teeth to click together like a pair of castanets.

"He was before you come aboard; but don't seem to have much authority now."

"Well, I allow he won't wear many plumes that we don't like. Does he live in Whitehall?"

"He came from Saratoga, I believe."

"It's none of your business where I live, nor where I come from," Tom snarled.

"An' we aint makin' it any, my bantam," Seth said with another not gentle shake. "Hold your tongue till you're spoken to, an' things will go more agreeable like."

Then, as he tired of holding him any longer, Seth gave him a rough push, which sent him prostrate to the floor by the side of his prisoners.

"Lay there till this 'ere conversation is ended, an' if you so much as lift your head I'll snap it off your shoulders, do you understand?"

Tom's previous experience had caused him to realize that whatever threats this tramp made would be carried out, and he did not make any reply, although he obeyed literally.

"What are you two fellers countin' on doin'?" Abe asked as he re-filled his pipe, which had been emptied when he fell, and proceeded to light it.

"That's a pretty hard question to answer," Roy replied, grimly. "We shall do the best we can, I reckon. Get the little craft back to Whitehall, if possible, and if not, go there ourselves when we have a chance."

"What did you intend to do with them?" the man asked Tom.

At first Master Tracey refused to make any reply, and then a menacing gesture from Seth caused him to give the information.

"I'm goin' to set them ashore when we get into the river."

"How far are you countin' on takin' this yacht?"

"To New York."

"It'll cost quite a bit to run her there, I reckon."

"But I've got—"

Tom ceased speaking very suddenly, as he re-

alized what he was about to say, but his unwelcome visitors understood as well as if the sentence had been finished.

"So you've got money enough to do the whole thing up in shape?" Seth asked as he arose from the locker and bent over the self-elected captain.

"Don't you dare to steal my money!" Tom shrieked. "Don't you dare to, or I'll—"

A vicious kick reduced him to silence, and a blow on the side of his head, which brought the red blood to the skin, prevented any resistance.

"You've got to learn, young feller, that when two gents come a visitin' of you, they must be humored in all their little whims, an' it's a whim of mine to see how well you're fixed."

Then, without further parley, Seth deliberately searched Master Tracey, and Abe gave vent to an exclamation of surprise and delight as he saw the rolls of bills which his companion transferred from Tom's pocket to his own.

During this scene Sam and Bill had been standing by the companionway, ready to take

to their heels if there seemed to be any necessity of escape, and Roy fancied that the latter was well pleased at witnessing this robbery.

As for Tom, he appeared quite as humiliated as angry. During his brief reign he had lorded it over his crew and prisoners in a similar fashion, although not with so much brutality, and to be thus forced to descend from the position of captain to that of victim was even more painful to his mind than his body.

"It seems as if things had been laid out for a regular picnic, Abe," Seth said, as he stretched himself on the locker once more, and prepared to enjoy his pipe. "I must say as how these young gents is givin' us quite a pleasant time."

"They couldn't do it better unless it should happen that them two are as well fixed as the captain," Abe replied, with a chuckle, as he motioned toward Sam and Bill.

"I haven't got a cent of money," Master Huntley said quickly, turning his pockets inside out to avoid the rough handling which might ensue if he were searched by the tramps.

"An' this is all of my pile," Bill added quite as promptly, producing a handful of pennies and small pieces of silver.

"Better let me keep it for you," and Seth assumed a fatherly tone as he extended his huge dirty hand.

No boy was ever more prompt to assist himself in being robbed than was Bill. He deposited the money in the grimy palm, almost before the words had been spoken, and then stepped quickly back to his post by the companionway stairs.

"I don't know as I have enjoyed myself like this for the last month," Abe said, musingly. "How much did you rake in on that haul?"

"It looks like a pretty good-sized pile," and Seth carelessly passed the money to his companion, as if accustomed to having large amounts of cash in his possession.

"Forty-six dollars in bills, an' quite a little stake in silver. Say, Seth, it's too bad to hang 'round here dry when there's a chance to get what we want. How would it do if I was to

toddle back to that place where we met this very pleasant captain, an' get somethin' to brace up on?"

"It would work mighty well, I reckon. But hold on," he added, as Abe rose to his feet, "I'll be more sure of seein' you back here if you leave the pile with me."

"I hope you don't think a little matter of forty or fifty dollars is goin' to break our friendship, old man," and Abe really looked pained because of his companion's lack of confidence.

"I shall be more certain of seein' you, that's all, an' I feel by you now jest as I do by these young gents, that it would be a pity to part company when everything is lookin' so smooth an' pleasant. Let me keep the money, except a couple of dollars, 'cause it'll be more business like."

"Only two dollars!" Abe repeated. "Why not get a supply while we're about it? I reckon five dollars would fill up a jug."

"All right; buy that much. We're likely to stay here quite a spell."

"I don't allow there's any show of your friends here tryin' to get the best of you while I'm gone, is there?"

"Well, if they think there is, they can try it," Seth replied, with a menacing gesture. "I'd like to see any one of 'em so much as look crosswise. It would be a sore job for 'em."

The tramp glared about him to note the effect of his words, and what he saw must have satisfied him that there would be no attempt to resist his authority.

Roy and Ned were helpless, as a matter of course. Tom had been thoroughly cowed, and Bill appeared too much frightened to even think of going counter to their "guest's" expressed or implied wishes.

"I don't allow it'll take me more than half an hour to pull down there an' back, an' I guess we'd better swing a lantern over the stern, so I sha'n't pass this place in the dark. We've had trouble enough huntin' for it not to want any more."

"Steward, get a lantern for the gentle-

man," Seth commanded, and Sam obeyed very promptly.

"Have we got plenty of tobacco to last us a week or so?" Abe asked.

"No, you'd better lay in a stock," and Seth handed his friend more money. "Don't stay down there half the night, tryin' to show you're flush; but come back as quick as you can."

"I told you I wouldn't be gone over half an hour, an' now to make certain, I'll put it an hour at the outside. I'll play square with you, Seth, don't you be afraid."

"I aint, so long as I've got the biggest share of the money; but all I'm scared of is that you'll try to put on airs, an' won't get back here much before mornin'. Besides, you don't want to give this snap away to anybody there, for it's too good to lose."

"I won't so much as yip about the find. There's no need of sayin' anything, till we've worked it for all it's worth."

"Can you see the lantern, if I hang it so?" Sam asked from the deck, and Abe went out to

make certain the steward's work had been properly done.

The occupants of the cabin heard him clamber into the boat, and five minutes later the sound of distant oars told that he had made his way into the canal.

CHAPTER XIV

AN ORGY

AFTER his friend left the yacht, Seth was inclined to be more sociable with those over whom he proposed to rule.

"Why don't you get up off the floor an' set on one of these 'ere lockers, captain?" he said, in what he probably intended should be a kindly tone.

Tom raised his head, and there was a look on his face which told that he was questioning whether the tramp's intention was to be friendly or continue the ill treatment already begun.

"I mean what I say," Seth said, as if in reply to the mute questioning. "If I had to be a little rough to start in with, it was because you began to work ag'in the grain. You hadn't found out what kind of a man I was, an' didn't seem to be over an' above civil. Now seein's how we're likely to be shipmates a good

while, things might go on in a family-like fashion. I'm jest the same as a lamb, I am, when I don't get ruffled."

Sam looked at this alleged lamb in considerable surprise, for meekness was a new phase of Seth's character, and inwardly resolved that the tramp should never again be "ruffled" during his stay on board the yacht, if he—Master Huntley—could prevent it.

Tom glanced cautiously around to make certain he would not be knocked down as soon as he rose to his feet, and then, with a curious mixture of defiance and submission, crawled to the locker opposite his masterful guest.

"Don't you think it's kinder workin' things rough to keep them two young gents tied up in that fashion?" Seth asked, carelessly.

"Well, I don't s'pose they are any too comfortable," Tom said, with a chuckle, as if, in his own abasement, it gratified him to see some one more helpless than himself.

"Then you don't think you'd better let up on them?"

"Of course not," Master Tracey replied promptly, forgetting for the instant that he was only the captain in name. "Once they got away, it wouldn't be two hours before the sheriff was on our track."

"On your track, you mean," Seth suggested. "Abe an' me are only guests on board here, you know, an' have got nothin' to do with the stealin' of her."

"No; you only take money," Tom very incautiously suggested.

There was an angry gleam in the tramp's eye for an instant, and then, as if it pleased his fancy to continue his lamb-like character, Seth said, in an explanatory tone:

"If I ever stole any money, it has been when some chap had hypnotized me, for I don't remember anything of the kind. I took what you had so it would be safe. When a young gent gets to layin' 'round the deck promiscuous-like, money aint safe in his pocket. But bless you, you know where it is! I've got it; it aint lost."

"I s'pose what your chum took down to the shop with him is about the same as lost," Tom muttered, growing bolder as Seth continued gentle in aspect.

"That's had to be laid out, so's you could treat your guests in the proper manner, do you see? You're such a precious cub, captain, that you don't know scarcely nothin' at all, an' I'm willin' to go out of my way once in a while, jest to show you what's what. Now, to sorter continue the lesson, it don't look respectable to the owners of this 'ere craft to keep them tied up in that fashion. What's your opinion?"

"I told you once that it wouldn't be safe to let them free," Tom replied, in a surly tone.

"You'll excuse me, captain," Seth said, with a comical leer, as he looked up at Sam and winked one bloodshot eye in a confidential way, "you'll excuse me; but I've got to differ with you on that 'ere subject. Accordin' to my way of thinkin', all hands of us oughter be sociable-like and friendly, an' that state of affairs can't be brought about while two of the company has

to be laid 'round on the floor like wooden images."

Singularly enough Tom did not understand this remark as a command, and made no movement toward carrying out the suggestion. Sam, however, realized that it was nothing more nor less than an order to release the prisoners, and stepped forward as if to obey it, when Seth said:

"Hold on there, steward. I don't allow as you've got any right to do a thing what aint been ordered by your captain. Now, lookin' at that young gent as he sets here facin' of me, I should say he was jest goin' to let up on them chaps; but it aint for you, my son, to step in to a matter like this when your captain don't give the word."

Unfortunately for himself, Tom was still too stupid to realize the full significance of the tramp's words, but fancied that his authority over these on whom he had previously exercised it was to remain unimpaired, and despite the rough handling he had received, he grew quite pompous again.

"Stay where you are!" he roared to Sam. "I've had enough of your meddlin' with things on this craft, an' don't intend to put up with any more."

Sam, eager to conduct himself in such a manner as to avoid the possibility of the same punishment the self-elected captain had received, retreated to the very threshold of the companionway, and Bill crouched by his side.

Roy and Ned understood that in a certain manner the coming of these strangers might prove beneficial to themselves, and watched the proceedings with keenest interest.

"Then you think the young gents outer stay trussed up like chickens ready for roasting, eh, captain?" Seth continued, as he carelessly raised a small coil of heaving-line.

"Of course they had," Tom replied, sharply.

In another instant the tramp had flung the rope, which was a formidable missile when used skillfully, straight at Tom's head, with such accurate aim that the alleged captain was knocked like a nine-pin from the locker, strik-

ing the floor with a force that thoroughly dazed him.

He lay prostrate upon the planks while one might have counted twenty, and then slowly raising himself to a sitting posture looked at the tramp in bewilderment.

"It 'pears like you'd had a shock of some kind, aint you?" Seth asked, solicitously. "I've heard of folks with such thick heads that it took a good while for an idee to get through 'em, an' now I reckon you've changed your mind about takin' the rope off them young gents, aint you?"

Seth was still in his alleged lamb-like humor.

By this time Tom who was getting rather more of his own medicine that he had as yet attempted to administer to his crew, began to realize the situation, and without further delay acted upon the suggestion which had been made in so emphatic a manner.

He untied the prisoners as quickly as possible, stopping now and then to rub tenderly that portion of his cheek which had come in contact

with the cabin floor, and when Roy and Ned were no longer fettered retreated to the corner of the cabin nearest the engine-room.

It was several moments before the prisoners could rise, so cramped were their limbs, and Seth said, observing their efforts to restore circulation in their arms:

"I reckon you'll be chipper as ever after a while, an' I'm glad the captain concluded it was best to let you move 'round a bit. You won't be any the worse for wear in half an hour from now."

"We're much obliged to you for this good turn," Roy said as he managed to regain his feet after some difficulty. "It wasn't at all comfortable lying there in one position, and it's twenty-four hours since we have been able to move."

"I've had a taste of that kind of business myself an' know what it means; but you don't want to thank me for it, lad. That was the captain's idee. There's no reason why we shouldn't all stop here sociable-like, so long as the skipper's made up his mind this is a good place to

stay in, an' there aint much chance of enjoyment when you're tied in knots."

"If there isn't any objection I'd like to go on deck," Roy said, making no effort to thank the "captin" for the involuntary interference in his behalf. "We've been down here so long that a little fresh air would do us good."

"I don't reckon the boss will make any objection," Seth said, in a fatherly tone. "The only trouble is, he's kind of afraid of losin' your cheerful company too soon, an' if it so be you'd promise him you'd hang 'round with us, I don't see as anything would prevent."

Roy seated himself very quickly as if to show he had no intention of making a promise which would bind him indefinitely.

"It would be foolish for us to leave here tonight, and on foot. I am willing to agree that we won't make an effort to get away before tomorrow morning, but wouldn't like to say more than that."

"If you're willin' to report to the boss before you think of lightin' out, there's nothing to pre-

vent your doin' as you want to till then. so far as I can see, eh, captain?"

Tom made no reply.

"We'll promise that," Roy said, readily, and motioning to his brother, he went on deck.

Sam looked after them wistfully, and then plucking up courage, he said, in a tone of entreaty to the tramp:

"I'd like to go on deck, too, sir, if you don't want me here."

"Why do you make such talk to me, you young villain!" Seth cried, as if in rage. "Don't you know that I'm a visitor on this 'ere craft, and wouldn't pretend to go contrary to the captain's orders. If he don't tell you to stay, it's none of my business where you go." Then turning toward Tom, he added: "Why don't you pull up this way, captain, an' be sociable? It 'pears like as if you wasn't pleased to have your friends 'round, when you stay so far off as that, an' look as kinder disagreeable."

Sam did not wait to see what the result of this suggestion would be, but slipped on deck, and

was immediately followed by Bill, who, since his arrival, had been expecting each instant he would receive the same treatment as that bestowed upon the self-elected captain.

"Well, things are getting decidedly mixed," Roy said when all four boys were standing in the bow of the yacht, where their conversation could not be overheard by those in the cabin. "I wonder what those men intend to do."

"If they keep on till to-morrow as they've begun, I won't say a word against them," Sam replied. "Tom Tracey's beginning to find out what it is to have a boss, an' it'll be a good thing for him."

"How long do you suppose they count on holding possession of the yacht?" Ned asked.

"That's a hard question to answer. They've got the upper hand now, and we ought to be glad, since we're allowed to move around; but I'm afraid the result will be that between them and Tom Tracey we shall lose the yacht entirely. How did you happen to bring them with you, Bill?"

Master Dean told the story of meeting the men, and how they had succeeded in getting on board the boat. Then he added, in conclusion:

"Tom didn't have a chance to tell me what he counted on doin' with the tramps when they allowed they was comin' to our camp; but of course I knowed he wanted to get rid of 'em. We pulled up the canal pretty nigh to Comstock, Tom makin' out he couldn't find the place, an' then started back on the other side, when this same feller what's givin' Tom such a dose, said: 'Look here, young feller, you aint goin' to play any games on us, and don't think you can tire us out, 'cause we're goin' to stay right with you. If you've got a camp, take us to it. If not, we'll row up to Comstock, an' hang 'round there to-night.'

"Tom, he kinder weakened on that, an' I reckon he saw, same's I did, that there wasn't any show of gettin' rid of 'em, so he says, says he: 'S'posen we haven't got any camp?' 'I didn't reckon you had,' the man answered, 'but

this boat come from somewhere 'round here, an' you'd better take her back, or we'll see that she don't get astray ag'in.'

"Tom saw then it wasn't any use to fool 'round, an' so did I. He says, jest like they was the best friends he had in the world, 'Look here, fellers, I don't s'pose we can help ourselves, so I might as well give you the straight story.' Then he told 'em we was out here in a yacht, an' tried to fix it up as if he owned the craft, but that we'd got to keep shady else there might be some trouble.

"You can see now that the boss of the two knew how much truth there was in the yarn, an' he told Tom if he didn't get there mighty quick he'd wring his neck for him. 'Cordin' to the way things have happened since we come on board, I reckon he'd have done it, too. Of course after that there was no bother about findin' the 'Gem,' an' you know the rest of the story."

"Well, I can't say whether it's a fortunate thing for us that these fellows came, or if it will

prove the destruction of the little craft. I'm afraid, though, that between Tom Tracey and the tramps, she'll suffer a good bit. If we could only—"

The sound of oars in the distance interrupted Roy, and an instant later the hail:

"Yacht ahoy!"

It was Abe's voice, and he spoke so unsteadily that there could be no question but that he had already been indulging in the beverage which he had visited the shop on the canal to procure.

Roy answered the hail in a low tone, and a slight scuffle in the cabin told that one of the occupants had risen to his feet.

Who it was those on deck readily understood, when Seth's voice was heard, in the fatherly tone which it had pleased him to assume a short time previous.

"Sit down, captin. Don't fret yourself jest 'cause one of the visitors have come back. I reckon you've got crew enough on deck to receive him as a gentleman of his cloth should be received, an' it's a shame for you to run the risk

of catchin' fever an' ague by puttin' your head out in the damp night air."

Despite the gravity of their situation, Roy could not repress a laugh as he pictured to himself the expression on Tom's face as he thus learned that he in turn was virtually a prisoner in the cabin.

Abe came alongside, passed up one end of the painter for Sam to make fast, and then, at imminent risk of taking a cold bath, lurched on board, clasping to his bosom a stone jug which was apparently heavy.

"All hands enjoyed theirselves since I've been gone?" he asked with a hiccough.

"The captain's been gettin' all the fun," Sam said with a chuckle, as he assisted the man to the companionway. "He's down here with your friend, an' the rest of us are kinder lookin' out for the yacht."

"That's right, my son, keep everything shipshape while you've got visitors on board," and Abe staggered down the companionway stairs, falling from the second step and striking the

floor with a thud that shook the little craft from stem to stern.

"Better help him up, captin, an' see if he's hurt himself," the boys on deck heard Seth suggest, in his placid tone, and Sam whispered delightedly:

"If them tramps have their way, which I reckon they will 'cordin' to the looks of things, Tom Tracey'll wish he'd never come aboard this yacht."

Loud calls for the steward prevented Master Huntley from saying anything more, and he scuttled below in the liveliest manner possible, understanding that the "guests" would not be well pleased if they were kept waiting.

"Bring in anything you've got that we can drink out of," Seth said when the steward was in the cabin. "It wouldn't be a bad idea to let us have some water, an' you may as well fetch along a few matches."

Sam obeyed the command by gathering up the drinking vessels from the engine-room, drawing a pail of water from the canal, and

adding on his own responsibility a certain portion of the eatables.

These articles he spread out on one of the lockers, turned the wick of the lamp up a trifle that the scene might be better illuminated, and then took his station near the companionway, awaiting further orders.

"That's all, steward," Seth said, with an affectation of politeness. "There's no need of you stayin' here unless you choose, for we can ring if you're wanted."

Sam hurried out into the open air again, and Tom must have made a motion to follow him, for those on deck heard Seth say:

"Better stay where you are, captain. We'll see to it that you have a pleasant evenin', an' couldn't think of enjoyin' ourselves unless you was with us."

Then ensued what can only be described as an orgy.

The men drank of the vile compound that Abe had brought until thoroughly intoxicated, and while so far as the listeners could under-

stand, they did not press any of the liquor upon Tom Tracey, he was obliged to sing or dance as best suited their whims, they all the while continuing the farce of treating him as their host, making him appear eager to do all he could for their comfort and happiness.

CHAPTER XV

AN ALLIANCE

THE boys on deck remained near the after companionway until the noise from below told that the "guests" were in that condition where they would hardly be likely to pay much attention to anything except what might be within their range of vision, and then Roy believed the time had come when he should take steps toward arranging for the recapture of the yacht.

The coming of the tramps complicated matters in a measure; but at the same time the owners of the "Gem" had been benefited to a certain degree, since it was now possible for them to move around at will.

They had bound themselves by a promise to make no move toward leaving the craft until morning, or after having given warning to the alleged captain, therefore it was only possible to concert plans for the future.

Roy had no idea the tramps would willingly give up the opportunity for a prolonged carousal until considerably more of Tom's money had been spent; but, he argued, Master Tracey was so thoroughly cowed by what had happened that he himself might desire to leave his unpleasant guests.

"Come forward where they can't hear us," he whispered to Sam and Bill. "They won't want us any more to-night; but if it should happen that Tom's company wish to be waited upon, we can hear when they call, provided we stay on the yacht."

"Why not sneak away now?" Sam asked. "We couldn't have a better show, an' I know Bill had rather go, an' take the chances of what will happen at Whitehall, than stay here any longer."

"Of course I had," and Master Dean spoke very decidedly. "I've got all of this kind of experience I need, an', 'cordin' to my way of thinkin', a jail will be a heap sight more pleasant than this craft before to-morrow mornin'."

"There are two reasons why Ned and I can't go," Roy replied. "In the first place, we have promised not to do anything of the kind—"

"But that don't count now, an' with this crowd," Sam interrupted.

"Indeed it does; we are bound to live up to our agreement, no matter under what circumstances it was made. Then again I shouldn't be willing to leave the little craft in such hands."

"Do you think there is any show of getting her away from this crowd?" Ned asked, in surprise, for since the coming of the tramps he had believed the "Gem" was lost to them for a long while, if not forever.

"No one can tell what may happen, and I shall stay aboard until she is wrecked, or in my possession once more."

"And of course I'm bound to be with you."

"If Bill and Sam are willing to help, with the agreement that they shall not be punished for having stolen her in the first place, it seems to me as if something might be done. These

men won't be sober to-morrow, and by that time I fancy Tom Tracey will be thinking only of how he himself can escape. He won't want to stay aboard a great while, especially if that fellow Seth continues to use him as roughly as he has done."

"But he'll hardly be likely to leave while they have all his money," Ned suggested.

"Perhaps not, yet if they keep on spending it as they have begun, it won't last a great while. The most important question is, whether Bill is willing to go in with us."

"Of course I am—that is," and Master Dean hesitated an instant before adding, "if you'll promise to help us out of the scrape we've got ourselves into."

Roy repeated what he had previously said to Sam, and added, impressively:

"If from this moment you do as we wish, helping us all that is possible, you shall not be punished by the law for stealing the yacht."

"Then it's a bargain, an' I'll be mighty glad to get home again. Of course father'll give me

a floggin'; but I'd be willin' to stand one every day in the week if I could be back now."

"We'll hope things will work around all right, and with four of us against a couple of drunken men, it shouldn't be a difficult job."

"We could start her this minute, an' neither of the tramps would know she was under way."

"Yes, but we've got to remain idle until morning."

"And what are we to do in the meantime?" Ned asked.

"Nothing except to watch for an opportunity, and take advantage of the first which offers after daylight."

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to put the oil that Tom bought into the tank," Bill suggested. "Then we should be ready to get under way in short order."

"That's a good plan," and Roy laid his hand approvingly on the shoulder of his late enemy. "We'll set about it at once; but must take good care not to make any noise, for there's no necessity of letting Tracey know what is being done."

The "guests" were making such an uproar that those on deck might have performed almost any task without betraying their movements to the "captain," and, half an hour later, the oil was in the tank.

"We'll try to overhaul the engine before morning," Roy whispered. "I heard Tom say something should be done to it."

"That's what he seemed to think," Sam replied; "but I couldn't make out anything wrong. It run well enough while I was in the engine-room."

"I'll have a look at it between now and sunrise. Suppose we go below, and there we may have a chance to get a little sleep."

"I'd rather stay awake for a month than to go where those tramps are," Ned said, with an involuntary shudder.

"I didn't mean that we should venture into the cabin. The engine-room is good enough for us, and I shall get a chance to examine the machinery."

The four, who now felt very friendly toward

each other because of the alliance between them, acted upon this suggestion at once, and now it was possible to hear distinctly everything which was said in the cabin, since nothing but a thin partition separated them from the revellers.

The tramps continued to address Tom as "captain," and it could easily be understood that he was having anything but an enjoyable evening.

Just as the boys came below Seth began to urge him to dance again, and Tom replied, in a tone of desperation:

"I can't. It seems as if I couldn't get my feet off the floor, I'm so tired. Why don't you let a feller sit down a little while?"

"Because we've come on a visit, captin, an' you oughter to be proud to do what little you can toward givin' us a good time."

"You've been makin' it nice and sociable for me, haven't you? My face is swelled out like a pumpkin where I hit the floor when you knocked me down, an' my back feels as if the skin was all off where you whaled me with the rope."

"It was only done in order that we might be well acquainted, young gent. You was gettin' offish, an' needed to be took down a peg or two, else we didn't stand any show of havin' a lively time."

"You won't have it a great while," Tom replied, sulkily. "Now them fellers what owns the yacht are free, the sheriff will be down on us mighty sudden."

"What difference does that make to us? We aint in his class, for we're only payin' you a visit. Now dance, captin, and dance quick, or there'll be more skin taken off your back!"

The sound of Tom's feet shuffling over the cabin floor told that he was obeying the command which had been given with such emphasis, and Sam chuckled with delight as he fancied the expression which must be on the "captain's" face as he was thus forced to amuse his "guests."

"He's havin' about as good a lark as he tried to show us," Bill whispered, with glee. "Them tramps are givin' him a full dose, an' by this time he knows how we felt when he bossed us

around, tellin' as how he hadn't stole the yacht, but we was the ones what would have to suffer for it."

Neither Roy nor Ned found any satisfaction in listening to that which was being done in the cabin. They thought only of regaining possession of their steamer, and to this end the former gave his undivided attention to the machinery.

"Is there anything wrong with it?" Ned asked, after his brother had worked in silence for half an hour.

"Nothing more than that the burners are clogged a little. I can soon have them free, provided Tracey is kept in the cabin."

"Even if he isn't, I can't see what should prevent you from doing as you please. I don't fancy he will attempt to interfere."

"Nor I; but he might tell the tramps that we were getting ready to run away with the yacht, and then our opportunities for work would be slim. I want them to think we are perfectly willing to remain on board."

"I'll go on deck and stand guard. You may

be positive no one has left the cabin until you hear me begin to whistle."

"All right. If I have another half hour I reckon everything will be in good order once more."

Ned acted at once upon his own suggestion.

Roy busied himself with the machinery, and the repentant pirates, tired of listening to the revellers, soon forgot their surroundings in the unconsciousness of slumber.

Roy had nearly completed his task when Ned came below.

"There is no necessity of my staying up there," he said, in reply to his brother's look of inquiry. "They have allowed Tom to cease his efforts at dancing, and he is asleep on the floor. Abe is helplessly intoxicated, and Seth has only sufficient sense to remain upright. In half an hour more he'll be dead to the world. If you hadn't made that promise, we could be at Comstock before either of them knew the yacht had been moved."

"If I hadn't agreed to make no attempt to

leave the craft, we would probably be in the cabin tied up like sheep. Instead of that very much has been done toward getting possession of the steamer. It isn't reasonable to suppose the tramps will be satisfied to remain sober so long as they have liquor, or money with which to purchase it, and I'm counting on being able to start from here within the next twenty-four hours. Don't be afraid, Ned, but that we shall succeed; I haven't been as hopeful since the little steamer was stolen. Those tramps have done us a good turn, for Tom Tracey no longer has the upper hand in this business."

"No; but those men have, and we may find them worse than Tom ever showed himself to be."

"Thus far their taking charge of matters has been fortunate for us, and there is no reason why we should borrow trouble. To-morrow morning will show them in their true colors, and there are a good many hours between now and then."

"How much longer will it be necessary to work?"

"Ten minutes."

"What shall you do then?"

"Get a little sleep, so we may be fresh in the morning, and in condition to take advantage of anything that turns up."

"I'm sleepy; I'll lie down now, unless there's nothing I can do to help you."

"Not a thing. Stretch out on the starboard locker, and I'll join you very soon."

In less than half an hour the owners of the "Gem" and the repentant pirates were all wrapped in the blissful unconsciousness of slumber, and a profound silence reigned over the yacht.

Until nearly daylight nothing could be heard save the heavy breathing of the sleepers and the snores of the drunken men; but then, had any one been listening at the after companionway, a slight rustling would have been apparent from the cabin.

Tom Tracey was awake, and fancied the moment had arrived when it would be possible to bid farewell to his disagreeable "guests."

He had no intention of going away without his money, however, and to secure that it was his purpose to take it from Seth.

That intoxicated individual was evidently so overpowered by the fumes of liquor as to be utterly oblivious to everything around him for many hours longer, and Master Tracey believed he would have no difficulty in recovering his property.

He had no further desire to remain on the "Gem," but intended to make his escape by means of the tender, once he had accomplished his purpose.

Creeping softly across the cabin, he began his search.

The tramp was lying on one side, and the money was in the pocket beneath him.

Tom turned him over as gently as possible, and inserted his fingers in the ragged vest.

He touched the roll of bills. In another moment it would be in his possession again, and he free to go where he pleased.

It was just at the instant when he believed

he had succeeded, that Seth rolled over imprisoning the "captain's" hand under his body.

The pain was intense, for it seemed to Tom as if his wrist was dislocated, if not broken, and he could not repress a cry of pain as he tried to release himself by pulling back vigorously.

Subsequent events proved that the tramp was not so nearly unconscious as his appearance had indicated.

Either Tom's cry, or his efforts to draw back served to awaken Seth, and he was not at a loss to understand why Master Tracey's hand was beneath his body.

Reaching out quickly he seized the boy by the throat, and shaking him vigorously cried, in an unsteady voice:

"So you've turned thief, eh, captain? Tryin' to rob your best friend?"

Tom could make no reply; the fellow's hand was on his throat so heavily that he breathed only with the greatest difficulty.

Stopping an instant to assure himself the money was yet in his own pocket, the tramp

HE THREW HIM OUT OF THE COMPANIONWAY DOOR INTO THE WATER

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raised Master Tracey high in the air, and then, as if he had been but a feather's weight, threw him out of the companionway door, clear of the rail, into the water.

A mighty splash followed, and then the sleepers in the engine-room were awakened by loud shrieks of:

"Help! Help! Bill! Sam! Help!"

CHAPTER XVI

RESCUING A PIRATE

Roy, Ned, and Bill were instantly awakened by the shrill cry for help; but Sam slept calmly on until the excitement had subsided.

During the first few seconds after he came on deck Roy was bewildered, but the repeated calls for assistance served to arouse him to a realization of what had happened.

"It must be Tom," he cried, as Bill stepped by his side; "but I can't see him."

"I reckon that's his head just astern of the boat. It don't look as if he could swim."

"Get a heaving-line; be ready to pass it when I come back," and Roy began pulling off his boots, for he had not undressed himself when he "turned in."

"Don't jump in! We can give him a line from here!" Ned shouted as he sprang from

the engine-room to prevent his brother from going over the rail.

He was too late, however, for Roy had struck the water while he was coming aft, and Bill darted to and fro in search of a spare line.

"Try to keep up a couple of minutes!" Roy shouted, encouragingly, swimming rapidly, as was necessary because of the current which was fast carrying the amateur pirate out into the canal. "Don't raise your hands or you'll sink!"

This caution was given too late. Before the words had left the speaker's mouth Master Tracey sank beneath the surface, giving vent to a blood-curdling yell as he went down, and the boys on the yacht felt certain he was drowned.

Roy, who was an expert swimmer, exerted himself to the utmost to reach the spot where the "captain" had last been seen, and succeeded in arriving there just as the sufferer rose to the surface.

Seizing him by the hair, he turned toward the yacht, now being forced to breast the current which was formed by the stream that emptied

into the canal, and sadly hampered by the struggling Tom.

"Keep still, or we shall never get there!" Roy cried sharply, and he did not dare waste any more breath, for he was rapidly becoming exhausted.

It was well the tender had been left at the stern of the yacht, for before he was near enough for Bill to throw the line with any hope of sending it within his reach, all strength seemed suddenly to have abandoned him.

Involuntarily throwing up one hand he touched the stern of the little craft, and in another instant was clutching it with the desperation of a drowning person.

Leaning over the rail, watching with agonizing intentness every movement of the swimmer, Ned saw that his brother could not pull himself into the tender, and, without hesitation, he dropped over the yacht's rail.

Five minutes later the rescuers and the semi-unconscious pirate were on the "Gem's" deck, and Bill was dancing to and fro, uncertain as to

what should be done; but eager to aid the two with whom he had made an alliance.

It would not have troubled him one whit had he known that Tom was dead. Indeed, it is quite probable he would have been well content knowing such was the case, for then the question of returning home might have been simplified.

"What are you running around so for?" Roy asked, sharply. "Take hold of his feet, and we'll carry him into the cabin."

"If you mean the captain, I advise you to leave him where he is," Seth shouted from below.

"But he has been overboard, and appears to be considerably more than half drowned."

"I know all about that, for I pitched him over. Caught him stealin' my money."

Roy could not repress a smile at this accusation, knowing that the money in question had previously been stolen by the tramp, and understanding it was quite possible Tom himself had committed a theft before coming to Whitehall.

"We must do something to help him," he said to the invisible tramp after a brief hesitation while these thoughts were flashing through his mind. "We should undress him, or something of that kind."

"There's plenty of room on deck, I reckon," Seth replied; "but if there isn't, pitch him over again. He's no good to anybody."

Tom was not quite as near death as his appearance indicated, for while Roy was trying to decide what should be done with him, he suddenly revived sufficiently to be able to stand unaided.

"Do you feel better?" Roy asked, solicitously.

"Was it you who jumped in after me?" Tom asked, without paying any attention to the question concerning his health.

"Ned and I both had a try for it. I didn't realize how much current this stream made, and shouldn't have gotten back to the yacht if Ned hadn't helped me. In case you're feeling at all decent, I suppose we'd better look out for ourselves."

"I shall be all right as soon as my clothes are dried."

"That will take quite a while, for the oil stove doesn't give out very much heat, and I fancy we shall have to wait until the sun rises."

It was quite a serious question as to what should be done for those who had taken an early morning bath. There were no blankets on the steamer, and the air was sufficiently chilly to render the wet garments decidedly uncomfortable.

"I reckon I can keep warm walkin' around here," Tom said, as he fell to pacing to and fro on the deck, and Roy, who did not think it his duty to give any more attention to the ungrateful pirate, went into the engine-room with his brother and Bill.

Their entrance served to awaken Sam, and that young gentleman sprang wildly up as if fancying some great danger threatened, which could not be averted without strenuous efforts on his part.

"What's up? What are you fellers knockin' 'round here in the dark for?" he cried.

"It's too late for you to get on your ear, Sam. The show is over, an' the performers are lookin' 'round for a chance to get dry."

It was necessary Bill should explain matters more fully, and by the time he had done so one of the lanterns was lighted.

He really was of considerable assistance, even though he had slept when danger threatened, for his first suggestion was worthy of adoption.

"I'll tell you how to fix it," he said, as he took off a portion of his clothing. "Me and Bill aint cold, 'cause we haven't been in the canal. We can lend you part of our clothes, an' then be warm enough while we stay in here."

"That's a great idea!" Roy replied, approvingly, as he threw off his saturated garments, and began to draw on the trousers Sam held out for him. What will Tom do?"

"I reckon you've bothered your head enough for him," Ned said, impatiently. "He didn't

even thank us for pulling him out; and if he prefers to walk around the deck, I'm perfectly willing he should."

"It seems as though we might try to make him more comfortable."

"It doesn't to me, more particularly when I think of his keeping us tied up until we could hardly move a finger. Let him go his own gait; if he wants to come in here, all right; but now that he isn't in any danger of a sudden death, I have no interest in him."

"He aint the kind of a fellow what would do much sufferin' without raisin' a row. When he gets right good an' cold he'll come inside."

"I reckon you're right, Sam," Roy replied, with a laugh, and then, putting the "captain" far from his mind, he proceeded to make himself as comfortable as possible under the circumstances.

When the two suits of clothing had been divided among four, neither boy was sufficiently dressed to brave the chill morning air; but by keeping the doors of the engine-room closed,

and the flame of the stove as high as possible, they were in no great danger of suffering.

"We might get something hot for breakfast while this stove is being run at full blast," Roy suggested. "I wonder if there is any coffee or tea aboard."

"There's plenty of coffee, but nothing to cook it in," Sam replied, as he produced one of the packages Tom had brought aboard at Comstock.

Using a can which had contained corned beef Roy succeeded in boiling a mixture which faintly resembled coffee, and a cupful of the hot liquid was decidedly refreshing to each.

Before the sun had risen all the boys, save Tom, who still remained on deck walking to and fro, had partaken of a very palatable breakfast, and Roy thought it time to begin a plan which he had partially formed in his mind the night previous while working on the engine.

Going outside he approached the "captain," and said, in a matter-of-fact tone:

"Last night I was obliged, in order to be allowed to move around, to give my word I

would not attempt to leave this craft without notice to you. I was held by the promise until this morning, and now I want you to understand that I am not bound in any way."

"There's nothin' to prevent you from goin' whenever you get ready," Tom replied, in a surly tone. "If I had my money I'd start this minute, while them brutes are asleep. Say, help me get that back, an' I won't say a word ag'in your takin' the steamer."

"I don't fancy you'll have a great deal to say in any case."

"You'll find out if you try any game. Don't think that I can't help myself jest because them tramps are aboard."

"I don't think anything about it, because I don't care. I've lived up to my agreement, and that settles my part of it."

"Then you don't want to make a trade with me?"

"Indeed I don't," and Roy left the "captain" abruptly.

"What have you been saying to him?" Ned

asked, as his brother came into the engine-room again.

Roy repeated the brief conversation.

"What are you thinking of doing? I know you must have some idea in your mind, or you wouldn't have made such talk."

"I've got what may answer for a plan; but we'll discuss it before deciding on anything."

Then Roy closed the door carefully, listened a moment at the cabin bulkhead, to ascertain if the tramps were astir, and beckoned his companions to the forward end of the apartment.

"Here's what I've been thinking of," he said, when they were where his words could not be overheard by those against whom he was plotting. "I'm not willing to go home without the yacht so long as there is the slightest chance of getting possession of her again. If we wanted to do that it would be an easy matter to leave now while the tramps are probably asleep."

"We might lock them in the cabin," Bill suggested.

"That was exactly what Ned proposed when we were creeping up on you at Comstock; but I opposed the scheme then because the woodwork is so frail that it could be torn down in a very few minutes. That sort of a plan won't work now when there are two men on board who would soon be able to make their way from one end of the craft to the other, no matter how many doors we should lock. I propose to stay on board and do whatever they order; but, in the meantime, Ned must run away."

"And leave you?"

"Yes, for awhile. I've got four dollars; with that you can take the train back to Whitehall, notify the sheriff where the yacht is, and bring back with you a force large enough to get possession of her."

"But I don't like to leave you alone," Ned replied, after a moment's thought.

"That doesn't count just now. Each one must do all he can to save the little craft, and this is your share of the work. It may be we shall see a chance to get her away from Tom or

the tramps, and if we do, so much the better for you."

"When shall I go?"

"Whenever you can do so without being seen. After the sun rises sufficiently high to give any heat, you'll go ashore to dry your clothes. The rest of us will remain quietly on board, and I don't think there'll be any trouble in getting off secretly."

"Of course I'm willing to do anything that promises the slightest chance of getting the yacht back; but I don't feel just right about leaving you here alone."

"It would have been different yesterday; but now that Bill and Sam have agreed to stand by us, I shall get along all right. Here's the money; keep it out of sight, or the gentlemen in the cabin may take a fancy to it."

"How shall I get ashore?"

"Give the tender's painter all the scope possible, and I reckon it will be enough to admit of her swinging until the stern touches the bank. I'll—"

Roy was interrupted by a cry from the cabin.

"On deck there!" Seth shouted. "Send the steward here, an' look lively about it."

"Go on, Sam," Roy said, as he pushed Master Huntley toward the door. "Be careful to obey every order they give, and treat them as well as possible, for it would be rather rough on us if they should decide to leave this hiding-place."

"Don't you worry but what I'll 'tend right out on their orders," Sam replied, with a grimace. "I saw what they gave Tom, an' don't hanker after that kind of medicine."

The steward ran quickly to the cabin, and Roy walked softly aft in the hope of overhearing what was said.

CHAPTER XVII

NED'S ESCAPE

SAM had simply been summoned to receive orders regarding breakfast. The "guests" desired that the meal should be served in the cabin, and were not well pleased when the steward explained that there were no dishes on board, nor anything to be cooked.

"Bring in what you've got, an' we'll look the collection over," Seth said, in a surly tone. "Where's that precious captain of yours?"

"The feller what called himself captain is on deck, an' I reckon he aint feelin' any too good."

"He'll be taken worse if he tries to play any more of his monkey-shines with me. Send him here."

Sam ran on deck as quickly as the most impatient employer could have desired, and there was an odd look of satisfaction on his face as he said to Tom:

"Them friends of your'n say you're to come down there."

"Don't you dare call them friends of mine," Tom cried angrily, making an attempt to strike Sam, but failing because Master Huntley was prepared for an assault, and readily avoided it.

"Well, whoever they are, you're wanted."

"They'll want a long while, for I sha'n't go."

Sam turned as if to enter the cabin, and Tom cried, sharply:

"Now what are you up to?"

"They'll expect to hear if I told you, so I've got to let 'em know."

"Come back here! You'd be mighty glad to see me get another floggin', I s'pose?"

"That hasn't anything to do with it. I don't allow to get one myself, so must say I did the errand."

Master Tracey understood full well what would be the result if the steward repeated his words, and he walked moodily aft, saying as he did so:

"I'll see what they want, an' you keep out

of the cabin while I'm there, or we'll have trouble."

"I certainly shall if I don't carry the grub they've ordered, an' I want you to understand, Tom Tracey, that you can't do any more bossin' 'round here."

"You'll find out whether I can or not."

"If you try it on I'll tell the man what took you in hand, an' then we'll see what's what."

After making this threat Sam hurried away, and when he carried the entire food supply below, Seth was giving Tom a very good idea as to what his course of action must be while they remained on board.

"If you try any more games sich as I caught you at this mornin' you won't get off so easy," the tramp said, with a menacing gesture. "We count on stayin' on this craft till we get tired of her, an' after that you can do what you like; but till then you'll toe the mark, or come to grief."

"I don't intend to stay on board," Tom replied, trying in vain to speak in a determined

tone. "The sheriff is bound to come sooner or later, an' I aint countin' on bein' arrested."

"You'll stay as long as we do, captain, an' that's somethin' you mustn't lose sight of. I don't know as you are worth your salt, but it suits our fancy to hold on to the skipper of the craft. Make the least show of givin' us the slip, an' what we've dealt out so far won't seem more'n child's play compared with our settlement. You might as well stay with us a spell now, for Abe may want to see some more dancin', an' he's so delicate in his mind that I wouldn't dare to have him disapp'inted."

"My clothes are wet, an' I've got to dry them," Tom whined.

"They'll dry in here, an', besides, you need some breakfast."

Seth overhauled the packages which had been brought in, and Sam, thinking it might be a good idea to impress the tramps with a view of his own importance as steward, said:

"Us fellers boiled some coffee awhile ago, an' I can fix you out with a can if you want it."

"Go ahead, my son," and Seth looked almost friendly. "Make it strong an' hot."

"We've got nothin' but a corned-beef can to boil it in, so I can't fix a great deal at a time, unless you're willin' to wait quite a spell."

"One can will do; I don't reckon the captain cares for any."

Roy hurried into the engine-room as Sam came on deck.

"Nothing could have been better for the success of our plan," he whispered, excitedly. "The tramps are bound to keep Tom in the cabin, and you can get away without any one's being the wiser. Put on your wet clothes, for they'll dry while you are walking, and remember how important it is to get to Whitehall in the shortest possible time."

"Suppose I telegraph father from Comstock?"

"It will be a good idea. Explain that you are coming home to tell him where the yacht is."

"What if the tramps should take a notion to leave here?"

"Then you must look for us further down the canal. I don't think they will dare pass Fort Ann, and it can't take very long to find us. Make a start now, and I'll stay here so I shall be able to say I didn't see you leave the yacht."

Ned had been dressing while his brother was talking, and now had made all his limited arrangements for the journey.

The two boys clasped hands for an instant, and then the younger went softly on deck.

Five minutes later Bill entered the engine-room.

"Ned got off all right," he said, exultantly. "The captain an' the tramps are still in the cabin, an' I don't reckon they'll find out he's given 'em the slip for quite a spell."

The expression on Roy's face told of the relief he felt at this information.

"How long do you allow it'll be before the sheriff can overhaul us?"

"Two days, perhaps three, providing the yacht remains where she is."

"What are we to do all that time?"

"That is what I can't say, Bill. I fancy the guests will have the general direction of matters, and we shall be obliged to dance to their piping."

"S'pose we go out in the sun now? Your clothes will never get dry if you stay down here."

Roy acted upon the suggestion, and the two stretched themselves out on the deck aft, where they could get the full benefit of the sun's rays, and at the same time hear all that was said in the cabin.

The tramps appeared to be making a satisfactory breakfast.

Sam served the mixture he called coffee, and the guests appeared to appreciate it.

Tom was eating, not very heartily, except when one or the other of the men looked toward him, and glaring at Sam as if he had some new cause for grievance against him.

"What we need to fix us about right, is fresh meat," Abe said, abruptly, after munching on a huge piece of corned beef until Roy began to fear he would choke himself.

"'There's nothin' to prevent our havin' it if you're willin' to pull from here to the shop."

"What's to hinder my takin' the steward along to do the work?"

"It wouldn't pay," was the decided reply.

"Why not?"

"He might have a chance to give somethin' away, an' we don't want to break up this 'ere pleasant little party yet a while. If you're willin' to go alone, I'm sure the captain won't begrudge the money you'll spend. It may make quite a hole in his pile, but it'll be all the same a hundred years from now."

Tom glanced angrily at the man, but turned his eyes away very quickly on meeting his gaze.

"I don't reckon it would pay for both of us to go?" Abe continued.

"Not much!" was the emphatic reply. "I'm needed here to keep things runnin' shipshape."

"That means he's goin' to have his eye on all hands of us," Bill whispered to Roy. "It's lucky Ned got away jest as he did, for once that

chap comes on deck there won't be any slippin' off for either of us, an' I don't feel very bad so long as Tom Tracey is gettin' a little more'n his share."

Abe decided to undertake the journey in order that he might have fresh meat for dinner, and orders were given to make the boat ready.

Bill seemed to think this a portion of his duties, and attended to the matter without delay.

"Hello! Are you still stickin' by the captain?" Seth asked as he came up the companionway to see his friend depart. "I kinder allowed from what you said last night that we shouldn't see you after sunrise."

"I'm still here," Roy replied, with an effort to appear calm. "You see this is my yacht, and I am hoping your friend, the captain, may become so tired of running her that I shall get her back without much trouble."

"He don't seem to be that way yet a while," the tramp said as he looked back with a leer at the unhappy Tom, "an' I can't think

he'd give up his job while he had friends aboard."

Master Tracey stepped forward as if about to make some angry reply; but the words remained unspoken. He realized in time what might, and probably would, happen, if he should show too palpable signs of anger.

Abe was ready to depart, and Sam assisted him into the boat with the greatest care. One would have said that the tramp was his dearest friend, so eager was he to be of some service.

"Take care of yourself," Abe shouted as he poled the boat into the canal, and Seth replied:

"You can bet I will. I know a good thing when I see it, an' don't intend to give up this snap yet a while. Look to it you keep a quiet tongue in your head, or we may have too many visitors."

"Trust me for that. I aint as big a fool as I appear," and Abe disappeared from view.

Seth evinced no disposition to return to the cabin after his friend had departed.

He stretched himself out on the deck by the

side of Roy, after gruffly directing Tom to sit "where he could keep his eye on him," and appeared willing to enter into friendly conversation.

Roy had no such desire, but it was no part of his plan to have an open rupture with the man, and the longer he was kept in good humor the better would be Ned's chances for getting safely away.

"I reckon you'd like to be out of this?" the tramp began.

"Yes if I could take my boat with me."

"I allow that can be done after awhile. Of course me an' Abe couldn't think of cuttin' our visit to the captain too short, but we shall feel like takin' to the road ag'in in a month or so."

"A month or so!" Roy repeated.

"Yes. I reckon you think that's quite a spell to wait for your craft, but 'cordin' to the looks of things it would have been a good bit longer if we hadn't happened along."

"I am willing to admit that."

"Of course you are, 'cause it's the truth.

Where's your brother? I haven't seen him since last night."

Roy tried with but indifferent success to look unconcerned. He had hoped Ned's absence would not be noticed for several hours, and now, when he had been gone hardly sixty minutes, the escape must be discovered.

"He went into the canal to help me pull your friend, the captain, out, and it was necessary to dry our clothes."

"Didn't he get along at the job as fast as you did?"

"Probably not," Roy replied, and the look of anxiety on his face could now be read so plainly that the tramp grew suspicious.

"Captain," he said, without turning toward Tom, "just run into the engine-room, will you, an' ask this young gent's brother to come aft."

Master Tracey obeyed with a very ill grace; but he returned quickly after a brief examination of the place.

"The other fellow aint here!" he cried, excitedly. "He's given me the slip, an' you

helped him off," he added, shaking his fist menacingly in Bill's face.

Seth sprang to his feet with more show of animation than at any time since he came on board the yacht, save on those occasions when he was flogging Tom, and looked quickly around.

He understood what the result might be if one of the owners of the steamer gave information of her whereabouts, and matters were now beginning to appear serious for himself.

"See here," he said, sternly, as he stepped in front of Roy, who had risen to his feet ready to defend himself, "I want the straight story from you. Don't try to lie out of it!"

"I wouldn't lie even if by so doing I could save the yacht," was the firm reply; "but there may be some questions I shall refuse to answer."

"It won't be healthy for you if you don't tell me what I want to know. How long has he been gone?"

"Not quite an hour, I should say."

"Where's he bound for?"

"Whitehall."

"What does he count on doin'?"

"Bringing the sheriff here."

Seth looked the boy squarely in the face a moment, and then turning on his heel, he motioned Tom to follow him into the cabin.

CHAPTER XVIII

A NEW HIDING-PLACE

Roy understood that Seth was decidedly disturbed by the fact of Ned's escape, and yet he was at a loss to understand the reason.

Both the tramps had, until this moment, apparently been indifferent as to whether the owners of the yacht went ashore or stayed on board, and hardly an hour previous Seth expressed surprise that Roy was still with them.

Now the tramp seemed frightened because of Ned's escape, and, if one could judge by his last movement, was about to take counsel with the amateur pirate.

"I reckon we're goin' to catch it hot now," Bill whispered, as Roy came forward. "What made you give him the straight story?"

"You think I should have lied, and tried to make out that I didn't know anything about Ned?"

"That's what I'd have done."

"It is always better to speak the truth, no matter what the result may be: In this case a falsehood would have accomplished no good, for he could understand that I was telling a wrong story, and both he and Tom can well fancy what Ned's errand is."

"I reckon his goin' will turn out to be a good thing for Tom Tracey."

"I don't know; but he acted kinder chummy when they went below. If Tom does have the bossin' of this craft again, us three fellers will have to step around mighty lively."

Roy understood this fully; but he thought it would be possible for him to submit patiently, in view of the fact that assistance must soon be close at hand.

"They're havin' a reg'lar row down there!" Sam said excitedly, as he tiptoed his way forward to where Roy and Bill were standing.

"What about?"

"That's what I couldn't find out. I tried to listen, but they whispered till a minute

ago, when the tramp flared up all of a sudden, an' it sounded as if he knocked Tom down. I hope he'll chew him jest about to pieces."

There was no opportunity for him to say anything more, for at that moment Seth's voice was heard shouting for the "steward," and Master Huntley made his way into the cabin with remarkable alacrity.

He was absent but a few seconds.

Before the startled boys had an opportunity of further discussing the situation, Sam reappeared to say breathlessly to Roy:

"You're to go right into the cabin," and he added in a whisper: "They've been havin' a row, an' Tom is sulkin' in one corner."

Roy understood that it would be wisest to answer the summons at once, since the tramp was master of the situation, and he went below without delay.

Seth was sitting on the locker near the companionway, filling one of the tin-cups from the contents of the jug, while Master Tracey, as

Sam had said, was apparently sulking in the further corner.

"Did you want me?" Roy asked, when the tramp evinced no disposition to begin the conversation.

"I wouldn't have taken the trouble to send for you if I hadn't," Seth begar, and then he paused until the contents of the cup had been drained, and his pipe was filled and lighted. "You claim to be the owner of this 'ere craft, as I understand it?" he continued when he had made himself comfortable with both feet on the cushions.

"I am one of the owners."

"Well, I allow you'll agree that the property aint doin' you any great amount of good jest now?"

"That is true; but I expect soon to have her in my possession."

"You won't if that cub does as he wants to. Now I've got no claim on the boat, except that I come here to stay a spell with the captain, an' don't want to break up my visit right away. He won't run her to suit me—"

"I said I'd do whatever you wanted if you'd give up the money you stole," Tom interrupted.

"Hold your tongue!" Seth roared. "If you speak before I give the word I'll set about learnin' you manners. The idee is this," he continued, to Roy: "I've got a notion of shiftin' hidin' places, so's your friend, the sheriff, can't find us right away, an' you're not to leave us if I can prevent it. The question is whether you'll run the craft, or take the chances of the engine bein' smashed by Abe or me in tryin' to do it?"

"He ran her down here," Roy replied, pointing to Tom.

"I know that; but there's a little difference of opinion as to whether he'll take hold now. He thinks I've got to come to his terms, or stay here; but that's a mistake. Now I'll give you a chance to act as engineer, an' I want you to understand that she'll leave this place whether you're takin' care of the machinery or trussed up in the cabin as you was when I come aboard."

Roy revolved the matter rapidly in his mind.

He would have preferred to take charge of the engine under almost any circumstance, rather than risk the chances of its becoming disabled. He realized that the implied threat of making him a close prisoner again could readily be carried into execution, and if he was thus helpless it would be impossible to do anything toward turning the tables on the amateur pirate and tramps.

Just for an instant a wild idea of secreting some portion of the engine so it would be impossible to run the little craft, floated through his mind; but he rejected it a second later as he thought of what it was in the power of these men to do. It would take but a short time to scuttle the "Gem," and almost any situation was preferable to that of seeing the yacht willfully wrecked.

"It takes you a mighty long while to make up your mind," Seth said, impatiently.

"That is true; it's a queer place for a fellow to find himself in. First, my boat is stolen, then my brother and myself are made prisoners,

and now I'm asked to help you hold possession of her."

"I aint really askin' you, but jest givin' out the chance; that's all."

"Suppose I should consent, would he still be the captain of the craft?" and Roy pointed toward Tom.

"Of course he will; but I promise you to a dead certainty he won't have a chance to do any bossin'. It'll be the captain's duty to wait on me an' my chum; he sha'n't interfere with any one else on board."

"Then I'll act as engineer."

"An' run her the best you know how?"

"Yes; but that is all I shall do. I'll stay in the engine-room and obey orders in regard to sending her ahead, astern, at full speed, or stop her; but nothing more."

"I don't see what else there is," and Seth looked perplexed.

"Neither do I; but yet you might call on me for something outside the engine-room in order to help you give the sheriff the slip, and I want

it understood at the start that if that time comes I shall do only what I think right."

"If you 'gree to run her 'cordin' to my orders till then, I'll be satisfied."

"Then you don't want me here any longer?" and Roy turned as if to leave the cabin.

"Hold on a minute. There's no need of bein' in sich a rush, for we sha'n't leave here till Abe gets back. How long will it take to get the boat under way?"

"Five minutes."

"It's a lie!" Tom growled. "That feller don't know anything 'bout runnin' an engine. She's got to be overhauled, an' you can't get out of this place under five or six hours. I laid her up in here so's to have a chance to put the machinery in runnin' order. If you trust to him you'll come to grief, an' find out that you'd better made the trade with me."

Seth flung the half filled cup at Master Tracey's head with accurate aim, and while that young gentleman was choking and strangling from the effects of the fiery liquid, which had

covered his face and partially filled his mouth, the tramp asked:

"Is that the truth? Don't try to play double with me, or you'll be sorry."

"Everything is in first class condition. I worked two or three hours last night getting ready for a run, in case I saw a chance of gaining possession."

"There's one thing I like about you, young feller," Seth said, in a tone of approval. "You've got a habit of telling the truth whether it's likely to do you good or harm, an' a man can trust you, no matter what he counts on doin'. All I ask is that you run the engine, an' if anybody aboard tries to make trouble, call on me. Now, captain," he added, turning toward Tom, "I'll be obleeged if you clean up this 'ere cabin a bit."

"Let the steward do that," Tracey muttered.

"I reckon you heard what I said, an' if you aint a doin' of it in short order, I'll be called on to get the dust outer your jacket."

Roy did not care to remain as a spectator to

what might prove a disagreeable scene, and left the cabin without delay.

Sam and Bill were waiting for him in the engine-room, eager to learn the result of the interview.

"Well, what's up now?" Master Dean asked, nervously.

Roy explained the new situation of affairs, and Sam gave vent to a prolonged whistle expressive of surprise.

"If I hadn't agreed to do it they would have forced Tom Tracey, and there is no knowing what he might have done to the machinery in order to be revenged on both them and me. It is better as it is, and I shall be on hand if there is a chance of outwitting the crowd."

After some discussion the boys came to the conclusion that Roy had been wise in agreeing to act as engineer, and they speculated long and vainly as to the probable destination of the yacht.

During the hour which followed they heard at short intervals shrill cries of pain, shouts and

jeers from the cabin, and it could readily be understood that Master Tracey was having a very lively, if not pleasant, interview with his guest.

Then a loud hail from the entrance to the canal told that Abe had returned, and Sam, as steward, went on deck to receive him.

The tramp was in a particularly good humor, as could be seen when he came alongside, and the many packages he brought told that a deep inroad had been made on Tom's money during this morning.

"Take these into your quarters, my brave steward," he cried, as he tossed the bundles on deck, "an' see to it that you get up the swellest kind of a swell dinner this noon. Where's the captain an' my chum?"

"They're both in the cabin."

"Help me; I aint as steady on my pins as I might be. You see, steward, it's mighty wearin' work to buy grub for a swell crowd like this, an' I'm about used up."

Sam did his best to assist the half intoxicated

man, and more than once did it seem certain both would fall into the canal; but the task was finally accomplished without accident, and Abe made his way into the cabin, leaving Sam to gather up the strange assortment of food which had been brought.

During the thirty minutes which followed the tramp's arrival, the anxious boys could distinguish nothing save a low hum of conversation from the cabin; but all knew that the question as to where the yacht should be taken was being discussed.

At the expiration of that time Seth made his appearance in the engine-room, much to the surprise of the "crew."

"You allowed to be the captain of this 'ere craft before that cub in the cabin took charge, didn't you?" he asked Bill.

Master Dean glanced furtively, and with no slight show of shame, toward Roy, as he replied:

"That's what I counted on bein' when we made sich fools of ourselves as to steal this yacht."

"Then I reckon you can steer?"

Bill nodded.

"Get into the wheel-house, an' see you obey what me or my mate tells you. If you try to run her aground, I shall take you in hand."

"Are you goin' to leave here now?" Bill asked, as if hearing for the first time of any such intention.

"That's the idee."

Master Dean hesitated an instant, as if undecided whether to obey or not, but a warning glance from Roy caused him to make up his mind very quickly, and he went into the wheel-house at once.

Tom was summoned on deck, Sam ordered to stand by to do what he could in the proposed task, and the tramps began to work the little craft out of the creek into the canal.

Roy set about raising steam, for nothing could be gained by delay since there was no hope the sheriff would come until after at least forty-eight hours had passed, and soon the "Gem" was in deep water.

"Send her ahead!" Seth cried, looking in at the engine-room door an instant, and then he went forward to give the helmsman instructions.

Tom Tracey was hurrying forward and aft, doing such odd jobs as his tormentors could find to keep him busy, and assisted frequently by blows and kicks, until it seemed as if his entire body must have been a mass of black and blue blotches.

Roy obeyed the order with a sigh, and soon the jaunty craft was speeding down the canal with a white ribbon of foam stretching out behind her.

CHAPTER XIX

ROY'S SCHEME

Roy had good reason for feeling sad, as the yacht sped merrily down the narrow waterway.

In two days Ned would lead the officers of the law to the creek where she had been concealed, and then a search—perhaps a tedious one, would be necessary. In the meantime he must remain on board assisting the tramps to escape, while he himself was a prisoner.

And yet there was very much to relieve the darkness of the situation.

While he was acting as engineer no injury would be done to the machinery, and there were many chances he might see an opportunity of giving these fellows the slip.

"There's no use in feeling bad about it," he said to himself. "I must keep my wits sharp, and who knows but that I shall have the upper

hand of this crowd at a moment when such an event seems least possible?"

Shortly after the yacht started Tom Tracey looked in on Roy as if about to speak; but before he could so much as open his mouth the end of a heaving-line descended across his back, and with a howl of pain he ran aft.

When half an hour had elapsed, and the "Gem" was beyond the shop where the tramps were first seen by Tom and Bill, Seth ordered Roy to "stop her," and the yacht lay motionless on that side of the canal opposite the tow-path.

Looking out, Roy saw what appeared to be a basin, now fallen into disuse, the entrance to which was barred by a sort of foot-bridge.

Abe had already gone ashore in the tender, and was trying to raise the obstruction.

It was evident the tramps intended to hide the yacht here, and Roy's heart beat high with hope, for he realized that it would be impossible to get the little craft out quickly if the officers of the law suddenly made their appearance.

"They're going into a regular trap," he said

to himself, and then came the thought that once inside this basin it would be impossible for him to do anything unaided toward securing possession of the "Gem."

"I can't help myself, whatever they do, and ought to be thankful she wasn't taken further away."

An instant later he was dancing to and fro in intense excitement, for an idea had suddenly occurred to him whereby Ned might be informed of the whereabouts of the steamer instantly he arrived at the creek where she had first been hidden.

After considerable difficulty Abe succeeded in raising the draw-bridge, and then Seth gave the word to go ahead at full speed.

The basin was so small that it would not be many moments before the yacht would run her bow into the mud; but Roy obeyed the order, and then looked out of the door.

Under Seth's directions Bill was steering for a clump of small bushes, and into these the "Gem" plunged, forcing her way fully twenty

yards inland from the point where it appeared as if the shore really began, when she lay motionless, hard and fast aground, but fully screened from view.

Roy stopped the engine without waiting for an order from the tramp, and then he no longer thought it such a happy chance that Seth had concluded to stop so near the old hiding-place.

If any one passed that way searching for the yacht, it would not be supposed she could be behind the bushes. Roy was forced to admit that he himself would continue on without a thought of her being in the basin, even though having received positive information she was in the vicinity.

"Well, they've hid her in great shape this time," Bill said, as he came from the wheel-house into the engine-room. "What's more, she is where we would have mighty hard work to get her out, even if they should leave."

"That's a fact," Roy replied, with a sigh. "I didn't suppose she could be forced so far into the bushes."

"When that fellow told me how to point her, I thought she'd stick before her bow really touched the branches, but she piled over them without any trouble."

"Have the tramps gone into the cabin?"

"Abe is closin' the bridge again, an' Seth stands aft watchin' him."

"Where's Tom Tracey?"

"He went below like a wet hen a minute ago. I reckon he counted on gettin' his money back when the tramps wanted to leave that place, an' he's boilin' because you run the engine."

"He's a fool if he thinks I would do anything to help him along. There's one thing certain, whether Ned and I ever get possession of this craft or not, and that is, Tom Tracey is being punished for what he has done to us."

"You're right. He couldn't be worse off in jail, and that's where he'll bring up before long. Sam an' me would be in the same box with him if you hadn't showed us a way out."

"There's considerably more you must do, Bill, before this thing is squared."

"Give me a chance, an' you'll see how hard I shall try to pay up for bringin' all this trouble on you; but it seems to me now as if we couldn't do anything except wait."

"That's what I thought when we started to come in here, but now the yacht is hidden so completely we must contrive to let Ned know where she is."

Bill looked perplexed.

"Has one of us got to run away? I'm willin' to try it if you say the word."

"I'm afraid they'll keep a strict watch on us now, and even if one should succeed in getting off it would only serve to give the alarm again. There's no knowing what they might do to the steamer if we gave them cause for being angry."

"Tom Tracey would jump at any chance; he's mad enough to do anything, an' it'll stand us in hand to keep our eyes open mighty wide."

"I won't leave the engine-room unless I'm obliged to, but either you or Sam must contrive

to get back to the creek after the tramps have turned in for the night."

"What could we do there?" Bill asked, in surprise.

"I'll write on some of this brown paper," and Roy pointed to the wrappings of the packages, "an account of where we are. It can be stuck up on a tree where Ned will see it, and we shall be all right again."

"That's a great scheme," Bill replied, approvingly. "I reckon I'm the only one to do the job, for they're likely to yell for Sam any minute, now he's steward; but they don't bother me much."

"Will you try to go there and come back?"

"Of course I will. It's precious little to do after bringin' all this trouble about. Say the word, an' I'll start this minute, without payin' any 'tention to what them tramps say."

"We must wait until midnight, or later, and then I fancy you can get away."

"I'll be certain of it if they tackle that jug same's they did last night."

Sam interrupted the conversation by entering the engine-room as if in the greatest hurry.

"Them fellers allow that I know all about cookin' jest 'cause I was so foolish as to make coffee for 'em, an' now the orders are to get up a swell dinner outer the grub Abe brought. I don't know any more how to cook than a duck does, an' they'll give it to me hot, I reckon."

The unfortunate steward looked really distressed, and Roy said, soothingly:

"I guess we can get you out of the scrape. I'm a pretty good hand at such things, and will do what I can to help. I don't see, though, why they should believe you a cook simply because you gave them that dose of coffee."

"Tom Tracey has had a hand in it. Things are goin' rough with him, an' he's bound we shall have our share. He said I knew how to do the steward business in great shape."

"If he don't succeed in doing worse than that we won't complain. What is there here in the way of food."

Sam unwrapped the different packages, bring-

ing to view fresh meat, bread, and several varieties of canned vegetables. There was also a small collection of tin dishes, and save for the lack of cooking utensils, the amateur cooks would not find it difficult to satisfy those in authority.

Roy did his best to please the occupants of the cabin, for he argued that they would be more likely to remain aft if the meal was all that could be desired, and his efforts were crowned with a certain degree of success.

When Sam served the meal he reported Abe as having said that there was nothing now to prevent their enjoying themselves thoroughly.

"Both of 'em think I did the cookin'," he said, gleefully, "an' Tom Tracey's all mixed up about it. He thought he was gettin' me in a mess, an' I reckon it don't set very well on his stomach to hear them praisin' me so strong."

"Is Tom havin' some of that grub?" Bill asked, in an angry tone.

"He hasn't had any yet. The tramps make him set in the corner an' watch them eat."

The boys in the engine-room had ample opportunity to satisfy their own hunger before the steward was summoned to take away the dishes, and when this work was done Sam reported that the tramps "had settled down for a good time."

"They've got Tom penned up in one corner, an' are smokin' him brown. He begins to look like a piece of bacon already."

While they were eating dinner Roy's scheme was explained to Sam, and now it was proposed that he remain on guard at the engine-room door to give warning if any one came from the cabin while Roy was preparing the message he proposed Bill should take to the creek.

On the largest piece of brown paper the following was printed in bold letters:

"The 'Gem' is in a basin two miles down the canal, behind a thick clump of bushes. Look sharp, or you won't see her."

"Here are some big tacks," Roy said, as he took a small package from one of the lockers, "and if you succeed in reaching the place,

fasten this paper to a tree where it'll most likely be seen."

"I know jest where it oughter go."

"Remember that you must travel as fast as possible, and not spend any more time at the creek than is absolutely necessary."

"Don't you be afraid of that. I reckon I can do it in an hour an' a half."

"You should be able to. Now we must wait until night before it will be safe to make the venture, and I think the wisest thing we can do is to get some sleep."

Sam was relieved from guard duty, the message hidden under the tool chest, and the boys made themselves as comfortable as possible on the lockers.

Not until nearly nightfall were they aroused from their siesta, and then Sam was ordered to prepare another "swell meal."

Thanks to their slumbers, all three were fresh for the night's work, and Bill declared that he could cover the distance from the yacht to the creek in half an hour.

When the evening meal had been served Sam reported that Tom still remained a close prisoner in one corner of the cabin, and the men were evidently making ready for another orgy.

Then came a long, anxious time of waiting.

Bill believed it would be safe for him to start at once, but Roy refused to listen to such a proposition.

It was possible, though not probable, that the tramps might want to see him, and if he did not answer their summons instantly suspicions would be aroused.

"It's better to wait too long than start too soon. After they are once asleep we shall be pretty certain of not being disturbed, and then there will be plenty of time, even if it takes you three or four hours to do the job."

The greatest danger seemed to be that Tom might be sent into the engine-room to spend the night after the tramps were tired of tormenting him, but that did not happen, and, finally, when it seemed to the watchers that the morning must be near at hand, sounds

from the cabin told that the revellers had succumbed to slumber.

"Now you can start," Roy whispered, pressing Bill's arm. "The hardest job is to get out of the yacht without making a noise."

"I'll manage that part of it. You fellers better stay where you are, for too many on deck at the same time might spoil everything."

"Have you got the paper?"

"Yes, an' the tacks."

"Then make the venture, and if we don't hear anything for the next five minutes we'll know you're safe away.'"

In the gloom the boys could distinguish Bill's form as it was outlined against the sky during the few seconds he paused in the doorway, and then it disappeared.

Roy's heart was beating fast and furiously as he listened for some cry of alarm from the cabin; but all was still there save for the heavy breathing of the sleepers.

One—two—three minutes passed, and then

the listeners fancied they heard a slight rustling of the underbrush.

"He's off," Sam whispered.

"Yes, but the worst part is to come, for if either of those fellows awakens before he gets back, he stands a chance of being discovered."

CHAPTER XX

TOM TRACEY

DURING the ten minutes which followed Bill's departure the occupants of the engine-room remained silent, on the alert for the slightest sound which should proclaim that the scheme had been discovered, and then Sam crept to the side of Roy.

"Let's sit up a while. I sha'n't be able to close my eyes till he gets back, an' the time won't seem so long if the lantern is lighted."

"Lie down again, and make believe you're asleep. It isn't certain but they have heard something, and are listening. If either should happen to come here, keep quiet, and shut your eyes."

Sam went back to his locker, and as the moments passed it seemed as if Roy had taken excessive precautions.

The regular breathing of the men could still

be heard, telling they were yet asleep, and when an hour or more had elapsed Roy resolved to grant Sam's request.

It seemed to him he might bear the suspense better if he could talk with his companion, and he was on the point of rising when a dark shadow appeared in the open door-way.

His heart literally ceased beating for an instant as he believed one of the tramps had discovered their secret, and he breathed more freely when he discovered the new-comer to be Tom Tracey.

Roy's first idea was that Master Tracey had made his escape from the cabin for the purpose of spending the night in the engine-room; but when the fellow began to steal in softly, as if afraid of awakening the occupants, it appeared as if he might have come with a different object in view.

Tom Tracey was not so kindly thoughtful as to make any very great exertions to avoid disturbing his proposed bed-fellows. He would have preferred to make all of them uncom-

fortable rather than the reverse, and, realizing this fully, Roy was on the alert for mischief.

The boy halted just inside the door-way an instant, probably in order to make certain his shipmates were asleep, and then he moved slowly and softly toward the machinery.

Roy was puzzled to understand the reason for this visit, and the truth did not dawn upon him until he heard the click of metal, as if Tom was handling some of the tools.

Then he realized that the fellow had come for the purpose of disabling the engine.

He could reap no benefit whatever from such wanton mischief; but was probably about to do it in order to be revenged because Roy had voluntarily acted the part of engineer at a time when he hoped to get back at least a portion of his money by refusing to do such work until the funds had been restored to him.

The owner of the "Gem" was in a sad state of perplexity as to what he should do.

As a matter of course he wished to prevent the mischief; but at the same time he considered

it of the highest importance that Bill's absence should not be discovered. If he attempted to stop Tom a hand-to-hand contest would most likely ensue, and before it was ended the secret he wished to keep might be discovered.

His first impulse was to let the amateur pirate do his worst, and trust to being able to repair the injury later; but he realized that the young scoundrel was sufficiently well acquainted with such engines as to be able to do irreparable mischief.

This last idea was enough to put far from his mind all thoughts of caution, and he slipped softly down from the locker.

Looking across the room, he saw that Sam was copying his every movement.

"We must handle him so roughly that he won't knew whether three fellows or only two have got hold of him," he muttered to himself, and in another instant he sprang upon the evil-intentioned Tom.

Roy had approached from behind, therefore

he had every advantage over the mischief-maker.

Seizing him firmly by the throat, he pulled him against the tool chest, overturning that with a great clatter, shouting at the same time:

"Bill! Sam! Lend a hand here!"

As a matter of course Sam obeyed the summons very quickly, and with the hope of giving his companion the cue to the plan he had decided upon, Roy said, loudly:

"Open the door, Bill! Sam, lay hold of this fellow's feet, and we'll carry him back to the cabin where he belongs!"

Sam was considerably mystified by this second appeal to Bill; but he did as he was requested, and almost before Tom realized the situation fully, he was on deck, being dragged rapidly aft.

"Go back to the engine-room, Bill, and see to it no one else gets in there!"

To Roy's great surprise and relief this command was followed by a hearty reply from none other than Bill himself.

"Ay, ay, sir, I'll take care of this part of the job!"

Master Dean had arrived most opportunely, and was clambering over the bow at the moment Roy emerged from the engine-room with his prisoner.

Now there was no longer any reason for making such an outcry, and Roy continued his work in a more quiet fashion.

"What's goin' on here? What's all this row about?" and Seth's head appeared in the companionway.

"Here's a friend of yours who sneaked forward to disable the engine, and he would have succeeded if I hadn't happened to be awake. We are obeying your orders in good shape, and it isn't fair a fellow like this should be allowed to make mischief."

"You're right, an' it sha'n't happen ag'in," Seth replied in a tone which caused Tom an involuntary shudder. "Give him to me, an' I'll see to it he don't come forward ag'in in a hurry."

The tramp clutched Master Tracey by the

collar, and that young worthy was hauled over the hatchway with as little ceremony as if he had been of no more value than a bundle of merchandise.

A heavy thud told that Seth had dropped him on the floor, and then the tramp said to Roy:

"You won't have any more trouble except to pass me down a stout piece of rope. He sha'n't disturb anybody on board this craft after to-night."

Roy supplied the tramp's wants with one of the heaving-lines, and then ran into the engine-room to learn how Bill had succeeded in his mission.

Bill was eager to hear of what had happened, and Master Huntley had just concluded the story when Roy joined the party.

"At first I thought they'd found out I was missin'," Bill said, with a chuckle. "I heard the noise while I was tryin' to make up my mind which would be the easiest place to get aboard, an' when the first yell come concluded

the best thing I could do would be to leave in short order. Then Roy hollered for me, an' I got on deck lively."

"I was trying to give Tom Tracey the impression you were with me," Roy said, laughingly. "I hadn't the slightest idea you were within a half-mile of here, and it almost frightened me to hear your voice. Did you do the work?"

"In great shape. The paper is nailed up where it must be seen if anybody gets as far as the creek, an' it can't blow down, for I drove pretty nigh that whole paper of tacks through it."

"I didn't think you would get back so soon."

"It was a case of puttin' my best foot forward every time, an' not lettin' the grass grow anywhere near me."

"I don't suppose you saw any one?"

"Not a soul, an' if I had I shouldn't have tried to make any talk, for fear of runnin' afoul of more like the two in the cabin. They're

cheerful birds, for a fact, an' I reckon they'll make Tom sing before long."

"Everything appears to be quiet in there."

"Most likely his boss don't want to take too much exercise in the night, an' is keepin' him over till mornin'. Say, how would it do to have another supper?"

"You shall have it if you feel hungry, for you've earned a dozen meals," and Roy lighted one of the lanterns preparatory to acting the part of cook.

The gray light of the coming dawn could be seen in the eastern sky before the meal was concluded, and then, instead of retiring, the boys went on deck.

The bow of the yacht had been forced ashore until it rested among the moss, and the boys could drop from the rail directly to the solid earth.

Sam wanted to indulge in a stroll through the woods, but Roy refused to entertain such a proposition.

"It might make them think that perhaps we

had been trying to send word home, and the worst thing that could happen to us just now would be to have them grow suspicious."

The boys lounged around the deck, talking of almost everything rather than the one subject in which they took the most interest, for Roy had impressed upon both the danger of their conversation being overheard, except when they were in the engine-room.

The sun had been up from behind the hills more than an hour when Abe's forbidding looking face appeared above the cabin hatchway.

"Hello; you chaps have turned out early," he said, in a friendly tone.

"We didn't sleep very much after your friend, the captain, visited us," Sam replied, with a laugh.

"You needn't be afraid of another visit very soon," the tramp said, in a meaning tone. "Say, I wish you would make some more coffee. That last was prime, an' I feel as if I could drink a quart."

"Do you want anything else?" and Sam rose to his feet.

"Not yet a while."

The steward disappeared in the engine-room, and when Roy and Bill joined him there a few moments later he said, gleefully:

"I'm glad that chap woke up, for now I'll have a chance to see where Tom is, an' I'm kinder anxious to know."

"You'll probably find him in one corner of the cabin as usual. We must keep our eyes open mighty wide after this, and never lose sight of the engine, for now he'll be more eager than ever to do the yacht some harm."

"I reckon his friends, the tramps, will keep a pretty snug watch on him from now out, and it can't be a great while before there's a change to this kind of a life," Sam replied, carelessly, as he started aft with the muddy looking coffee.

When he entered the cabin Seth was apparently asleep, and Abe was sitting on one of the lockers with his head between his hands as if suffering great pain.

Tom was there also; but not in one corner, as Roy had fancied.

He was bound hand and foot, exactly as he had fettered *his* prisoners, and was lying on the floor in the most uncomfortable position Seth could devise.

"I'll straighten you fellers out!" he growled, as Sam looked toward him. "That Barclay chump needn't think he's ever goin' to get this craft back to Whitehall, for I'll 'tend to her if I'm killed for it!"

"It seems to me you've helped make trouble enough," Sam replied, feeling decidedly disturbed because of the threat. "I don't see as Roy has done anything to you, except try to get the yacht back."

"You're goin' to be awful good now, aint you? Butter wouldn't melt in your mouth, would it? But you was the one what stole this boat in the first place, an' coaxed me off with you."

"An' you was willin' enough to stay while you could boss Bill an' me around."

"I'll do somethin' worse'n bossin' you!" Tom

cried, vindictively. "Jest wait an' see how much there is left of this craft when I get through with her!"

"Shut your mouth, or I'll put a plug in it," Abe cried, dealing the prisoner a vicious kick which reduced him to silence immediately. "We've had chinnin' enough from you since last night, an' won't allow any more."

There was nothing to detain Sam longer in the cabin, and he returned to his own quarters, where he repeated Tom's threats.

"Of course he can't do anything while them tramps are there," Master Huntley said, in conclusion, "an' if they should leave him alone, I'll take a hand at watchin'."

Roy looked decidedly disturbed.

"He may succeed in carrying out his threats, in spite of all we can do. Those fellows sleep about half the time, and Tom is vicious enough to take desperate chances in order to do me some mischief."

"I don't see as he can kick up much of a row while he's tied."

"But we don't know how soon he may smooth matters over with the tramps, and be set free. If that should happen, I believe he would burn the little craft. If Ned had only started sooner!"

"Perhaps he'll get here to-day."

"There's no chance of that happening. He hasn't more than gotten back to Whitehall, and we can't hope to see him before to-morrow at the very earliest."

"I'll hang 'round the cabin a good bit, so's to find out how things are goin'."

"That wouldn't do very much good, Sam. All Tom will have to do in order to gain the confidence of the men is to pretend he don't care about the money, and agree to do whatever they want. My greatest fear is that he will think of such a plan, and be at liberty this very day."

CHAPTER XXI

FIRE

WHEN Seth aroused himself the steward received orders to prepare breakfast, and, as before, Roy did the greater portion of the work, leaving to Sam all the credit.

On this occasion the steward learned that his labors were not to be brought to an end when the food had been placed in front of the tramps.

"I reckon you'll have to 'tend to my friend, the captain," Seth said, when Sam was about to return on deck. "He can't help himself, an' somebody's got to feed him."

"What's the use of all that bother?" Abe growled. "He aint worth it. If his legs are tied I reckon that's enough, so why not cast his hands adrift, instead of keepin' a decent feller like the steward waitin' upon such as he is?"

"It seems that he has fallen into the bad habit of roamin' 'round in his sleep, an' when he was brought aft, long about midnight, I thought he'd best be prevented from strayin' again; but 'don't know as there's any special reason why we should keep him hitched up so snug, except that he oughter have an idea of how pleasant he made it for the owners of the yacht."

"You needn't spend your time here," Abe said to Sam, as he unfastened the bonds from the prisoner's wrists. "If he can't feed himself he'll go without grub, that's all."

Sam was decidedly relieved in mind at being spared the duty of waiting upon the self-elected captain.

There was a vicious look in Tom's eyes which seemed to say he was in that frame of mind where he would be glad to vent his ill-humor on friend or foe, and Master Huntley felt quite positive he was not safe while he remained within striking distance.

After the morning meal had been prepared

Roy and Bill put up the awning, which had been taken down when the steamer stopped at Comstock, and their work had but just been completed when the tramps came on deck to learn the reason of their movements.

"Now this is what I call comfortable," Abe said, in a tone of satisfaction, as he dragged one of the cushions from the cabin and laid down on the deck aft. "It's a blamed sight more pleasant up here than below, an' I don't count on seein' the cabin again except to sleep in."

Roy went forward as soon as Abe thus took possession of the after-deck, and Sam, who was washing dishes in the engine-room, asked:

"What have they done with Tom?"

"Left him in the cabin, I suppose, since he hasn't come on deck."

"If they untied his hands, an' I reckon that's what must have been done, seein's how I wasn't called on to feed him, he won't have to work a great while to get the ropes off his feet."

Even then his condition will not be im-

proved so very much unless he is allowed to come on deck."

"I've got an idea it won't be long before we'll see him swingin' 'round puttin' on airs same's ever," Sam said, with a meaning gesture.

"He'll have to set about doing it soon, or Ned will break up the sport by introducing him to the sheriff."

"Then you've got over thinkin' Tom will do mischief."

"Not a bit of it. I feel certain he will try to do some damage to the yacht; but he won't have much chance in the daytime, and to-night I intend that all three shall keep a sharp look-out."

"You can call on me for anything you want done," Master Huntley began, and before it was possible to finish the sentence a summons from Seth caused him to go aft very suddenly.

He was absent only a few moments, and when he returned Roy asked:

"What's the row now?"

"Abe is goin' over to that shop again. If you'll believe it, them tramps have drank up all

that was in the jug, an' now think they need more."

"Did they fancy it necessary to ask your permission?"

Seth wanted me to wash a bottle he must have brought in his pocket. If them fellers keep on like they've begun, we shall be called on to light their pipes."

"Is he going in the tender?"

"I reckon not; it would take an hour to get her through the bushes, an' then the bridge would have to be raised again."

Roy went on deck to see how Abe proposed to make the journey, and Seth called him aft.

"My friend an' I are goin' up through the woods a bit," the tramp said, in a friendly tone. "The captain isn't well enough to come out of the cabin yet, an' I want to know if you'll promise not to leave the craft till I get back? If you don't agree," Seth added, "we shall be obleeged to make certain it can't be done."

This was neither more nor less than a threat

to tie up all three of the boys, and Roy understood that it would be useless to refuse.

"How long do you count on being away?" he asked.

"An hour or so. Why do you want to know?"

"Because it might happen that you concluded not to come back, and I wouldn't like to feel that I must stay here all summer."

"If we haven't shown up by noon you can do as you like," the tramp replied, with a laugh. "Don't let the captain suffer for anything while we're gone, an' if you fellers want to square matters with him, there'll be a good chance, providin' you take care he doesn't raise so much of a row as to let the boatmen on the canal know the steamer is hid here."

"We sha'n't try to pay off any old scores," Roy replied, gravely.

"Suit yourselves; it's nothin' to us," and Seth began to clamber clumsily over the side.

Roy stood near the rail until the tramps were

lost to view amid the foliage, and then said, half to himself:

"I wonder how they count on getting across the canal? We are on the side opposite the shop, and, from their general appearance, I should say they would be opposed to taking a bath."

Bill and Sam were near at hand, and the latter replied:

"They most likely know how to work it. I wish both of 'em would fall overboard. I don't know that I'd care to have them drown; but I'd like to see them so near it that they couldn't get back here."

"If Roy hadn't promised not to leave the yacht, this would be a good chance to give them the slip," Sam suggested.

"I wouldn't go, even if I hadn't promised. We stand a good chance of getting possession of her again, and I want to stay by."

"It isn't certain Ned got through all right," Bill said, thoughtfully, "an' if he didn't, we may be waitin' here for what'll never happen."

Until this moment Roy had not fancied his brother might meet with an accident, or be delayed in any way, and the thought suggested by Bill's remark was by no means pleasant.

"We won't think anything of the kind can happen," he said, after a long pause. "It is fully as much as I can do to act as servant to a couple of drunken tramps, in the belief that Ned is certain to bring help very soon; but if I should let myself imagine he might not get here for a week, it would be impossible to keep my temper when they play the part of masters."

"Then the best thing you can do is to allow we shall be out of the scrape in a day or two," Sam replied, quickly. "I reckon we'd be in a tough box if them fellers made up their minds we wasn't satisfied to stay here a spell."

"It can't be they intend to remain a great while, for they have sense enough to understand that some one will hunt up a valuable craft like this."

"Most likely they'll leave when Tom's money

is spent. Perhaps they've gone now, an' want to make us believe they're comin' back," Bill suggested.

"There's no such good fortune as that for us. Our only hope of saving the little steamer is through what Ned has done, or is doing," and Roy turned as if to enter the engine-room.

Sam noticed that there was an unusual expression of despondency on the boy's face, and as a means of arousing him from gloomy thoughts he said, much as if suggesting some very pleasing means of passing the time:

"Let's see how Tom Tracey is gettin' along? He may be up to mischief if we don't keep a sharp watch on him."

Roy started aft very quickly.

For the moment the ex-captain had had no place in his thoughts; but once this precaution was suggested, all his fears returned with yet greater force.

When he was in the cabin it seemed foolish to fancy the prisoner capable of doing mischief.

His legs were bound securely, and his hands

apparently so confined that he was unable to so much as raise them to his face.

It surely seemed as if Master Tracey realized that he was conquered. Instead of making bold threats, he remained silent when the boys entered, and hardly raised his eyes.

Had he been defiant, it is more than likely Roy would have made certain he could not release himself from the bonds; but he appeared so disheartened that it was very much like striking a fellow when he is down to stand there looking at him, and the three walked out of the cabin without speaking.

Neither of the visitors had noticed that the rope was laid across Tom's wrists, instead of being tied around them, therefore they had no suspicion he was trying to deceive.

"He is beginning to understand that he only makes matters worse by being ugly," Roy said, when the three had returned to the engine-room. "The tramps made certain he couldn't give them the slip before going away, and I don't fancy there's really anything to fear from

him; but, nevertheless, I shall keep my eyes on this engine as much of the time as possible. It wouldn't take very long to disable it in such a manner that a good deal of money would be necessary to get it into running condition again."

Then, in low tones, lest they should be overheard by the prisoner, the boys discussed the chances of Ned's returning with the officers of the law on the following day, and an hour had elapsed when Sam said suddenly, as he started to his feet:

"I reckon the tramps are comin' back. I smell smoke; most likely they've got some tobacco worse'n what they had before, and that is needless, for it's about as much as a feller's nose is worth to go into the cabin when both their pipes are goin'."

Now that his attention was called to the odor, Roy perceived it plainly.

"That isn't tobacco," he said, looking out of the door. "There must be a fire in the woods."

Without any definite idea of what he was doing, Sam stepped on deck, and an instant

after he had done so his companions were electrified by hearing him cry sharply:

"The yacht's afire! O you villain!"

Then was heard the noise as of some one making his way through the underbrush, and by the time Roy and Bill had gained the deck, Sam was leaning over the rail shaking his fist as if menacing the bushes which so completely encircled the "Gem."

"What is the matter?" Roy asked, excitedly, not heeding the fact that a stream of blue smoke was issuing from the companionway, but trying to discover something among the foliage to account for Sam's angry ejaculations.

"It's Tom Tracey! He jest jumped over the rail! Look there!" and the agitated steward pointed aft.

A cry of dismay burst from Roy's lips.

The smoke had increased in volume, and it appeared as if the cabin of the little craft must be completely enveloped in flames.

At the same instant Tom Tracey parted the foliage in front of him, and cried, jeeringly:

"You chumps thought I was tied up so I couldn't do anything, eh? I'll show you now how much you can get the best of me, even if you do curry favor with tramps. The yacht will never leave this place, an' I'll wait here to see the last of her."

Roy hardly heard what he said, or, hearing, did not understand the words.

He was running at full speed aft, and without heed of the possible danger, leaped into the cabin.

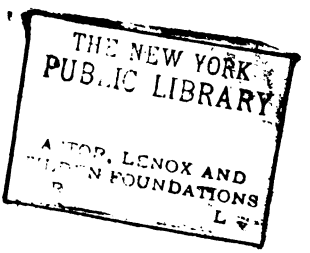
By the time he emerged Sam and Bill were at the companionway, while Tom continued to jeer and threaten, as if words were necessary to fill out the full measure of his revenge.

"There's a chance of putting it out!" Roy gasped, nearly choked by the smoke. "Get something to bring water in!" and he ran to the engine-room where there was a bucket half filled with the now precious fluid.

In another instant he had returned with this, and entering the cabin, poured it directly on the blaze, taking care not a drop should be wasted.

"STAY WHERE YOU ARE AND LET THAT CRAFT BURN"

(See page 339)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When he emerged for the secend time a new danger confronted him.

Bill and Sam had followed him forward, gathered up the empty cans from the engine-room, and started over the rail to fill them from that portion of the basin directly under the yacht's stern, when Tom Tracey, brandishing a club he had found on the ground, cried menacingly:

"I'll break the head of the first feller that comes over! Stay where you are an' let the craft burn, or I'll fix you so you'll never see home again, you sneaks!"

The odds were decidedly against those who would save the little steamer from destruction, for before either could clamber over the rail, Tom would be able to deal an effective blow with his weapon.

CHAPTER XXII

THE TABLES TURNED

For an instant Roy stood silent and motionless, gazing down at the vindictive boy, who was determined the yacht should be destroyed.

Each second the fire gained headway, and a very brief delay now would be fatal to all hopes of saving the steamer; for once the flames gained a hold upon the woodwork it would be well nigh impossible to check them with the limited appliances at their disposal.

That Tom Tracey would do as much injury as possible there could be no doubt, but Roy had little fear for himself where the safety of the "Gem" was concerned.

"You an' Sam do your liveliest at bringing water," he said, in a low tone to Bill, "and I'll tackle that fellow. I don't know as I can get the better of him, but it'll be possible to keep him from interfering with you."

"He'll jest about thump the life out of you with that club," Sam objected.

"I'd almost rather he would do it than stand idly by and see the steamer burn," Roy replied. "Now make ready to jump over the other side, and I'll see what can be done with him."

Tom understood what it was Roy intended to do, and was both prepared and eager for the contest.

Strange as it may seem he felt a bitter enmity against the boy he had injured, and believed his time of complete triumph was at hand; for, in addition to destroying the "Gem" he would give Roy such a flogging as would disable him, and then Master Tracey intended to depart very suddenly from the scenes of his exploits, making no further attempt to regain the money which the tramps had taken from him.

Roy poised himself for the leap, understanding how much advantage might be gained if he could spring directly upon his antagonist, and then, when it seemed to Sam and Bill as if

his feet had already left the yacht's rail, he relaxed his muscles, standing motionless as a statue while he gazed at something directly behind Tracey.

Involuntarily the latter turned his head, and a shriek of dismay burst from his lips, as at the same instant, he attempted to flee.

A man was making his way through the underbrush directly toward him, and Master Tracey recognized in the new comer an officer from Saratoga.

Had he begun his work of revenge five minutes earlier he might have succeeded in making good his escape, but now it was too late.

Even as he sprang toward the bushes the officer's hand was upon his shoulder, and his face paled as he heard the man say:

"It is evident you are up to some new mischief, Tom Tracey; but I reckon you are through with that sort of business at present. Your last trick in Saratoga was sufficient to give you free lodgings for quite a spell. Have you any of the stolen money left?"

Roy did not wait to hear any more of the conversation. He had a fairly good idea that justice had at last overtaken Master Tracey, and understood now it would be possible to make every effort at extinguishing the conflagration without fear of interference from the boy who had worked the mischief.

Fortunately the pail of water which had been brought from the engine-room checked the fire to a certain extent, and at the end of ten minutes it was entirely extinguished without very serious damage having been done.

One end of the port locker was badly burned, and the curtain immediately above it, destroyed. The paint was blistered and blackened, but Roy understood that four or five dollars would be sufficient to pay for repairing the interior.

Not until the last spark had been extinguished did either of the three boys give so much as a thought to their enemy, and then Sam ran on deck to ascertain what the officer proposed to do with Tom.

He was too late to gain any immediate infor-

mation. The man and his prisoner had disappeared.

"Well, that job was done up quick," the steward said, in a tone of satisfaction. "He must have snaked Tom across the canal as fast as he could, but what puzzles me is, how he knew he was here."

Roy gave no thought to the injury done to the cabin, so great was his relief at knowing he no longer need be on his guard against the self-elected captain.

"It has been a good morning's work for us," he said, with a long drawn sigh of relief. "In twenty-four hours from this time I fancy we shall be headed for Whitehall."

"I reckon it will be a pleasanter trip for you than for us," Bill said, moodily. "We have put ourselves in a mighty bad scrape, an' there's no need of tryin' to shove all the blame on to Tom Tracey, for I was the one who really began the work."

"We won't say any more about that part of it," Roy replied. "Since leaving Comstock you

and Sam have been willing to do what you could to repair the mischief, and I'll answer for it that you don't come to any harm."

A noise as of heavy bodies making their way through the underbrush caused the boys to look up quickly, and there they saw the unwelcome faces of the tramps.

"If you say the word," Bill whispered, "we'll have a set-to with them right here. I aint afraid but that we can get the best of both, an' be in undisputed possession of the steamer before Ned comes back."

There was no necessity of such extreme measures, as was soon learned.

"Has the officer got the captain?" Abe asked, in a low tone.

"Yes; how did you know he was after him?"

"The man was over at the shop makin' inquiries, an' we told him where Tracey could be found. Now look here, Barclay, while I don't allow we've done anything to you that might get us into trouble, we're willin' to turn to an'

help put the steamer on her way home, if it'll square things. We was visitin' your captain, an' now that he's startin' out on another kind of a voyage, neither Seth nor me holds to it that we've got any right aboard. Say the word, an' we'll soon have the yacht out of that nest of bushes."

"Nothing would suit me better," Roy replied, heartily; "but how are you going to do it?"

"It won't be a long job. With a craft so small that we can almost pick her up, it's the same as done already. We've brought a couple of axes with us, an' in an hour from now you shall be afloat, unless I'm very much mistaken."

Abe was not mistaken.

Before sixty minutes elapsed, so energetically had he and his companion worked, that the little craft was freed from the tangle of foliage, and was being warped out through the drawbridge.

Not until then was Roy sufficiently curious

to ask concerning Tom, and he inquired where that young gentleman was.

"The officer come down from Whitehall in a wagon, an' snaked the captain off before he could make any explanation as to where the last of the stolen money had gone," Seth replied. "Me an' Abe don't think it's jest healthy for us to lay 'round this part of the country any longer, so we're goin' to cut across lots, and say good-bye to you here."

No formal leave takings were indulged in.

Abe cried as he tossed both the axes on board the steamer,

"You can haul up at the store, an' leave them. If any one wants to know where we are, say we've taken to the woods," and with this remark he and his companion disappeared from view forever, so far as those on board the "Gem" were concerned.

It can well be understood that the return trip was not delayed.

Everything was in readiness for starting the engine, and after the screw had begun to re-

volve, Roy took up his station in the pilot-house, leaving to Bill and Sam the duty of watching the machinery.

The axes were returned, and at the fastest speed allowed by the rules of the canal company, the "Gem" pushed her way through the sluggish waters, heading for Lake Champlain.

At the lock below Comstock, Roy was both surprised and delighted at seeing his father and Ned, who had come down in Fernald's boat, not having been able to persuade the sheriff that it was necessary one of his deputies should be sent immediately in pursuit of the thieves.

Ned succeeded in making the journey to Whitehall more quickly than his brother anticipated, and Tom Tracey's arrest had been the means of returning the "Gem" to her rightful owners only a few hours before they would have regained possession of her through the assistance of their father.

"I am glad I succeeded in getting her before

you came," Roy said to his brother when they were beyond the lock with a clear stretch of water between themselves and the lake.

"I don't see what difference that makes."

"I can't say I do exactly, except that there's a good deal of satisfaction in having accomplished the work without assistance. I suppose some people will say we ought to have started in when the ropes were first untied from our legs and arms, and had a regular row with the thieves and tramps; but I don't believe that would have paid half as well as the way the matter has been worked."

Then Roy gave a detailed account of what had occurred since Ned left the steamer, and when he concluded his brother asked, anxiously:

"Was much damage done by the fire?"

"Nothing of any account. It can all be set to rights in a couple of days, and we shall be able to begin running regular trips as soon as there is any great amount of business to be done. Does father understand that we have

promised not to trouble Bill and Sam for their share in this work?"

"Yes, I've explained all that to him. He thinks it is better as we have arranged affairs, for to send those fellows to jail wouldn't undo what has been done, and I'm certain they are so sorry for having stolen the yacht that they won't indulge in any such pranks again."

The incidents herein related, regarding the theft of the "Gem," occurred two years ago, and during this last season the writer, on a visit to Lake Champlain, had the pleasure of a day's sail with Roy and Ned.

The latter was acting as captain, the former as engineer, and Bill and Sam were employed as "crew." The ex-pirates had been hired at the beginning of the second summer, after the steamer had passed into the possession of the boys with all the formalities of the law, and when they had several hundred dollars as a working capital.

During the coming summer it is understood that another boat will be purchased by the firm of Barclay Brothers, and she, so Roy explained, will be officered by Bill and Sam.

THE END